THE ACQUISITION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT in Ancient Russia

by I. M. KONTZEVITCH

PROFESSOR I. M. KONTZEVITCH AND HIS WIFE HELEN
in front of their icon corner, at the time they collaborated
on this book. Paris, 1950.

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I. M. Kontzevitch

Translated from the Russian
by Olga Koshansky

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of Alaska Brotherhood

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Cover: "The Passion," a painting by Vasili Linitsky. When Elder Nectarius of Optina – the author's spiritual father and one who had acquired the Holy Spirit – was beheld in Uncreated Light, the closest earthly color to which this Light could be likened was violet. Hence the color scheme which the publishers have chosen for this cover.

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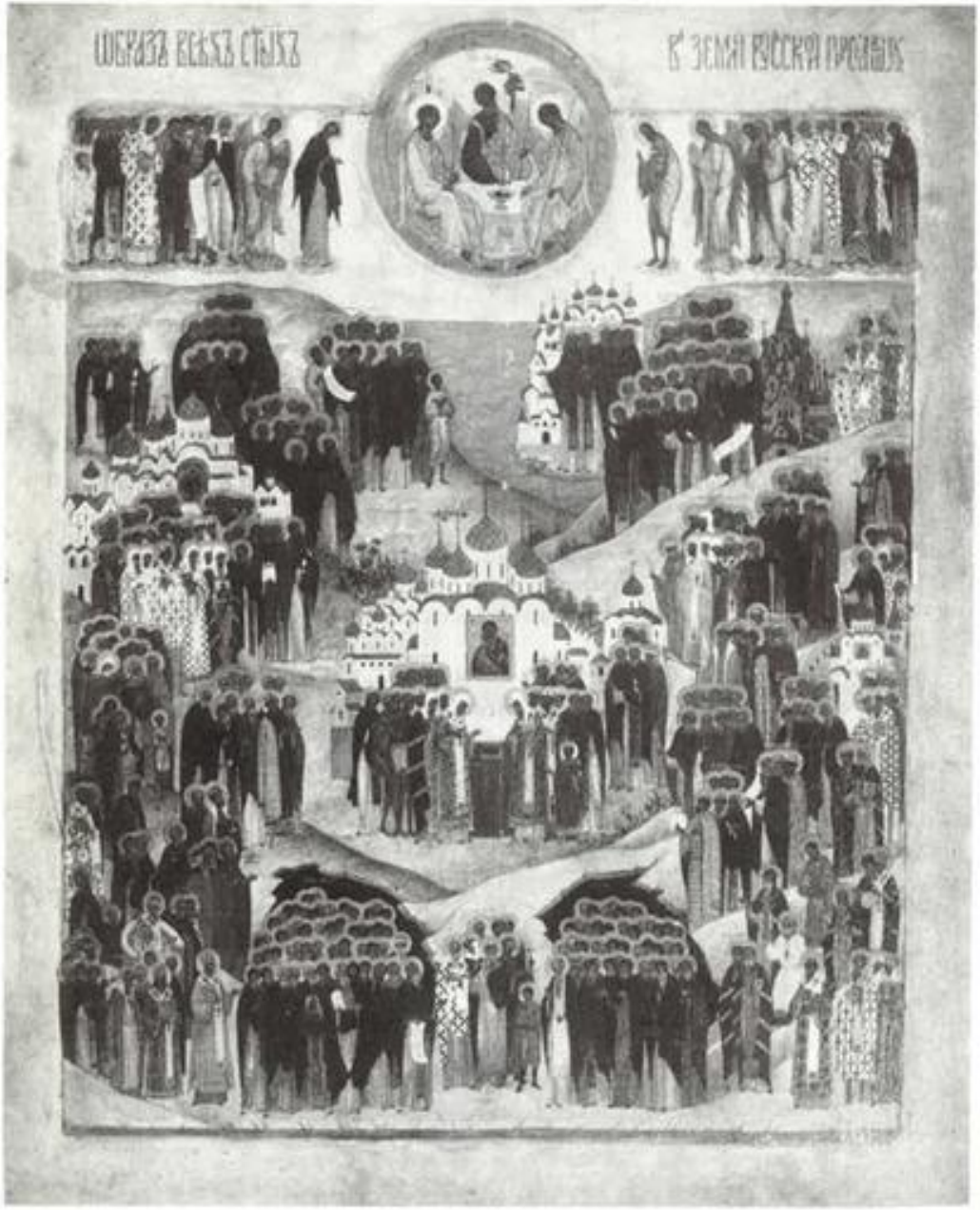
The author dedicates this book
to the light-bearing memory of his mother,
Nun Nectaria.

The translator dedicates this edition
to the memory of her parents,
John and Evdokia.

The publishers dedicate this book
to the Millennium of Holy Russia.



ALL SAINTS GLORIFIED IN RUSSIA

Icon by M. N. Sokolova, 1981.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

I.

THE ACQUISITION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT is the main aim of man upon this earth, for it is through the ascetic struggle of "pulling down" the Holy Spirit into a repentant, humble heart that man gains justification before the face of God. Christ is our Savior only as long as we realize we are perishing; and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the actuality of being saved.

When Our Lord Jesus Christ sent down the Holy Spirit as He promised to His faithful followers, it was the personal, individual exploit of people of various nationalities that, having led to the saving state of union with God, transformed whole nations. Having the original apostolic community as a model, countries have built their civilizations on Christian principles, on the Faith of Christ that makes man Godlike. At various stages in the history of Western civilization, Christianity has made inroads and created saints who have become national heroes; and these heroes have set the tone for the specific characteristics of their respective nations. In one way or another these nations, becoming infused with holiness, have developed indigenous qualities of sanctity which have colored the essence of their arts, literature and customs.

Christian ethnic characteristics are valid only if they stem from the genuine acquisition of the Holy Spirit. This unites all in Christ, and thus to the state of Adam before the Fall, to the paradisiacal state for which man was made. But if there is no link and there is estrangement from that initial source – the traditional, historical path of acquiring the Holy Spirit – then the result is separation, peculiarity and oddity, a source of strife and discord. The historical acquisition of the Holy Spirit as reflected in local, national churches has created a heavenly choir composed of earthly men and women who have transfigured themselves into saints – friends of God.

The path to acquire the state of sanctity is not an easy one because it involves the voluntary self-crucifixion of the fallen man — and war with the devil, the flesh and the world. But for today's God-thirsting neophytes, this 2,000 year-old path has certainly been well-trodden, cleared and sign-posted with knowledge that has been acquired from practice and passed down in the context of various languages and cultures by God-loving pastors and teachers who have known God first-hand. Such knowledge constitutes Patristic Theology, the ascetic or practical aspect of which has been well presented by I. M. Kontzevitch in his work, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia.* This book, which is presented here for the first time in the English language, is the result of the independent will of a loving scholar who encountered a saint in his youth, St. Nectarius of Optina. Impressed by the reality of sanctity being alive in the 20th century, Kontzevitch dedicated his whole life to preserving and presenting the path to this sanctity, the guides or directors of which were holy elders unknown to Western Christendom.

II.

To commemorate a thousand years of Christianity in Russia, we present to the contemporary reader a series of modern patristic texts hitherto unpublished in the English language. Even in modern times, with the revival of Orthodox Christian values, Russia has produced an amazing output of sanctity, firmly rooted in and stemming from ancient Byzantium. Such phenomenal wellsprings of spirituality as Sts. Seraphim of Sarov, John of Kronstadt, Paisius Velichkovsky and his Optina disciples, the New Martyrs of Russia, and the Blessed Wonderworker John Maximovitch — are all universal gifts bequeathed from the Holy Russia of modern times. These Saints, as well as the Orthodox ascetic theology which made them such, have not been presented adequately for contemporary men and women. It was the hope of our late Professor Kontzevitch to acquaint contemporary God-seekers with the very essence of the Orthodox hagiographical tradition — the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of the Apostolic offices of saints and prophets.

As the first volume in this series, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit* strives to give a historic survey of the very nature of sanctity as it has been revealed historically and acquired by genuine carriers of grace. This, the main work of Professor Kontzevitch, gives a 1,000-year panorama of historic climates and conditions which were either conducive or hostile to the spread of the God-chosen men and women, called God-bearing Fathers and Mothers by the Orthodox Church.

The book is divided into two subjects: 1) what in essence is basic Christian asceticism, and 2) how it originated and spread to Russia. The authors, Ivan and his wife Helen Kontzevitch, were living representatives of that very tradition that produced saints: they were linked to St. Seraphim, St. John of Kronstadt, the Optina Elders, and more recent saints and martyrs who have adorned the "Church Triumphant" in heaven. A brief biography of the author and his wife are to be found in the Appendix, which deliberately mentions righteous men and women bound up with them, hitherto unknown, who would have remained in oblivion.

This book, written under very unfavorable post-war conditions, is essentially a textbook of ascetic theology. This is a subject that has been neglected in contemporary theological schools, resulting in the apparent lack of sanctity in today's Orthodox society. The aim of the authors and the publisher is to fill this gap — to inspire Orthodox Christians to lead a true spiritual Orthodox life in conjunction with the spread of Orthodox revival, both in the Free World and behind the Iron Curtain. By publishing this work, we realize that the book will reach Russia, be re-translated and do its work toward the salvation of many souls.

The value of this work lies not only in its exposition of the very essence of Christian religion, so meticulously and precisely presented, but also in the fact that the authors had direct contact with saints who themselves acquired the Holy Spirit. It is not only a scholarly study, abundant in research and data, but is in itself almost a personal testimony by the authors, concealed in their humbleness.

A few points are not sufficiently developed in the book: first, the "Viking influence" coming upon ancient Russia by way of the Northwest, from which came Olga, the grandmother of St. Vladimir the evangelizer; and, secondly, the influence of Valaam Monastery, which through Sts. Abramius and Leontius of Rostov influenced the great St. Sergius of Radonezh, the Abba of all North Russian monks.

The women saints are almost omitted, but an appendix was written twenty years later with the participation of the author's wife. A whole series of saints, namely those of the Kiev caves, were skimmed over because of the lack of time and space. Moreover, the ending of the book was not fully finished. It is hoped that the special sections on iconography and the Orthodox philosophy of Kireyevsky will supplement the apparent gap.

In addition to brief biographies of modern Russian ascetics, a whole series of monographs on the Optina Elders are intended to follow in this series, so as to complete the picture of the attempted Triology of Professor Kontze-

vitch. *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit* was to be Volume I; a book on the immediate disciples of St. Paisius Velichkovsky was to be Volume II; and *Optina Monastery and its Era* was to be Volume III. The first came out in 1952, and the third came out twenty years later, briefly incorporating Volume II in its original chapters. The publisher, St. Herman Press, which was founded with Professor Kontzevitch's participation, published in Russian the *prima vitas* of eight major Optina Elders, photographically reproduced from books of the Kontzevitchs' collection; while the Lives of the last two Elders, Barsanuphius and Nectarius, were fully incorporated into *Optina Monastery and its Era.* With God's help and the prayers of our readers, it is hoped that the treasury of these ten volumes will see light in English translations, which have been undertaken with the participation of Professor Ivan Kontzevitch's widow herself.

This, in total, constitutes a spiritual offering to contemporary God-seekers who long to possess not only scholarly editions, but texts which transmit the essence of contemporary ascetic theologians themselves.

III.

Through a reading of *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit,* many questions and doubts of new converts to Orthodox Christianity will be answered. This book is published in the hope that it will enable readers to refine their power of discernment, which is so imperative today when superficiality and imitation are so rampant. The English-speaking world, although rooted in the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit being present on earth, is rapidly losing this fine, mathematical precision in identifying the genuine from the seeming. It is hoped that the reader will hesitate a moment before the holy realm contained in this book, and will call the Holy Spirit to his aid. In such a way will he benefit from this labor of love, and from its pages will come forth hundreds of ascetics whose names are charged with holiness. May those of the English-speaking world not miss the fine line between the state of sanctity and the state of delusion, and may they come out as victors in the lofty activity of acquiring the Holy Spirit. For after all, the intent of the author and publishers is not merely to inform, but to witness to the Divine Fire that historically *did* descend upon this earth, *did* touch the thirsty hearts of fallen men, *did* change the face of whole nations, and *did* deposit into the holy Orthodox tradition a living spark that is alive today and is potent to renew this very English-speaking civilization, causing goodness to spill out even upon unsuspecting bystanders.

Glory be to God for all things!

Abbot Herman
October, 1988

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THE ACQUISITION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ANCIENT RUSSIA came forth into the world in Paris in 1952. A second edition was published in Canada in 1973 by offset, without any changes or corrections. The book is dedicated to the investigation of the spiritual life of the Russian people from the days of Russia's baptism, and especially at the end of the Tatar invasion, when there arose the possibility of having intercommunion with countries of the Near East (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia) which had assimilated the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas.[1] The crowds of Russian pilgrims who visited these lands, upon their return home, hastened to institute this teaching on their native soil.

By this time St. Sergius of Radonezh erected a monastery in the dense forest in the vicinity of Moscow. This monastery grew to become a spiritual center for the whole land, under the name of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. The *Life* of St. Sergius indicates that in his monastery there existed the distinct characteristics of hesychasm, which subsequently affected all ascetic exploits in the northern part of Russia known as the "Northern Thebaid." Amidst fierce northern nature, the life of the ascetics demanded supernatural *podvig*, accompanied by the ceaseless doing of the Jesus Prayer. This Prayer stood as the eternal foundation of the legacy of Russian monastic exploit for the duration of Russian history. In spite of periodic persecutions, hesychasm remained as an inalienable quality of Russian monastic sanctity. Thus it was until the last Elder of Optina Monastery.

1. *I.e.*, the teaching of hesychasm. See Part II, chapter 3 *(editor)*.

Closely linked with the tradition of hesychasm is that of eldership. The Apostle Paul talks about gifts, one of which is prophecy (Eph. 4:11). *Eldership is this gift of prophecy.* This idea was not in the Russian editions of *Acquisition,* for we had not arrived at it then. It is now installed in the English edition. In the discovery of this idea lies the whole meaning of the life of Ivan Michailovitch Kontzevitch. It is indeed a discovery, for by it the essence of eldership has been unlocked. Eldership is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which no one understands.

According to the word of St. Paul, *God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues* (I Cor. 12:28). This apostolic decree is unwavering and unchangeable in the entire life of the Church, from the beginning to the end of the ages. It refers first of all to apostolic ministry, in other words, the sanctifying service of the Church. This ministry of service is apparent for all to see. The second ministry is prophetic, and has also been permanently instituted by the Apostle. Although it does not have visual demarcations, it nevertheless has just as inviolable a place in the Church and a firm foundation in ecclesiastical life. The prophets, under the name of eldership, always existed in the Church. The gift of eldership was acquired in asceticism and bound up with monasticism.

Like the teaching of hesychasm, eldership was brought to Russia by pilgrims from the Orthodox East, and from its influence arose the monastery of St. Sergius and the whole of Northern Russian monasticsm. The elders were not tied to the existing order of government, and were therefore free. This is the root of the unofficial Church of the people, which existed during all the days of Russian history. Periodically it endured conflicts with the official Synodal church. At the decline of piety in the country, the elders, bearers of the gift of prophecy, were misunderstood and persecuted. There were many examples of this in the lives of the elders of Optina Monastery. The church authorities wanted to banish Elder Leonid to prison in Solovki. A bishop wanted to expel Elder Ambrose from Shamordino Monastery, and when he came to execute this plan he found the Elder dead. Elder Hieromonk Barsanuphius was forcibly removed from Optina; and the last Elder of Optina, Schemamonk Nectarius, endured a similar fate. Also, the Russian church authorities did not treasure the prophet St. John of Kronstadt. He, too, was subjected to attacks.

Finally, in connection with eldership, it is imperative to say that true monasticism cannot be bound up with pseudo-eldership, the characteristics of which are described in Part I of this book.

Helen Kontzevitch
Berkeley, California

GLOSSARY

akathist: a special, lively service to Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, or a saint, during which one should stand; literally, "not sitting."

antimens (antimension): a shroud in which are sewn the relics of a martyr, and on which a priest serves the Liturgy.

byt: way of life.

chiliasm: specifically, a heresy that asserts that Christ will set up an earthly kingdom; in general, any mentality that expects heavenly blessedness to be realized in any earthly way.

hesychasm: an ascetic practice associated with the anchoretic way of life and involving mental stillness, inner spiritual concentration and unceasing prayer.

hesychast: one who practices mental stillness.

hieromonk: a monk in priestly rank.

kenosis: compassionate self-emptying.

klobuk: monastic headwear.

lavra: a large coenobitic monastery.

metochion (metochia pl., *podvorye* in Russian): a monastic dependency of a large monastery.

moleben: a service for the living.

podvig: ascetic exploit; spiritual struggle.

prelest: spiritual deception or delusion; not seeing reality the way it is.

prosphora: leavened bread for use in the Divine Liturgy.

schemamonk: one who has taken on the highest and strictest monastic discipline, denoted by a special cowl and stole.

semantron: a special board which one hits with a stick in order to call monks to prayer.

skete: a small monastery, usually a close-knit "family" of up to 12 monks with the abbot as their father.

sotainnik: sharer of the monastic secret or mystery *(taina);* co-mystic.

starchestvo: eldership.

staretz: an elder.

stichera: a verse of liturgical poetry.

OPTINA MONASTERY ON THE ZHIZDRA RIVER

From the Kontzevitch photograph collection.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

All footnoted books and articles are in Russian, except where titles are written in French or German, or where English is indicated.

INTRODUCTION

BY THE AUTHOR

The stone which the builders rejected
is become the head of the corner.
(Psalm 117:22)

THE GREATEST GIFT bestowed upon man is his inherent ability for communion with God, for beholding God. In this lies supreme happiness. It is man's task to develop this gift within himself. God's purpose with regard to man is deification.

In "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit" lies the entire meaning of ascetic labors and of the lofty spiritual "mental prayer of the heart." However, if lofty spiritual contemplation here on earth is the lot of the few, unceasing prayer is the duty of every Christian. *In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you* (I Thes. 5:17-18), says the Apostle Paul to Christians, and the great hesychast (man of stillness) St. Gregory Palamas (14th century), calls on everyone to pray unceasingly. According to him, all Christians, not only monks and hermits but laymen as well, should practice unceasing prayer.

The purpose of the first, theoretical part of the present work is to present a comprehensive, if only brief, exposition of the essence of ascetic sobriety and spiritual prayer leading to communion with God and, in connection with this labor *(podvig)*, of grace-giving spiritual counselling as exercised by elders *(startsy)* as a guiding principle. The influence of eldership *(starchestvo)*, how-

ever, is not confined within monastery walls: it extends far beyond their borders. Being a guiding principle in the spiritual and moral manifestations of life not only of monastics but also of lay people, it embraces all manifestations of life in general, both spiritual and secular, which are inseparably interconnected and at the same time clearly differentiated.

The second, historical part explores the development of ascetic labors in ancient monasticism in the East and in Russia in the 10th-17th centuries. There is also discussion of the effect of the life-giving forces on the "ways of ancient Russia," when in the days of the early flowering of Christianity they penetrated to the depth of the nation's heart.

The author's initial inspiration for the present work came about as a desire to systematize the uncoordinated printed material dealing with the Lives of the last Elders of Optina – namely, the Lives of Schema-archimandrite Barsanuphius and Hiero-schemamonk Nectarius – and to convey his personal reminiscences of visits to the Optina Monastery.

The author visited there twice: the first time in the summer of 1916 during June and July, and then again in the summer of the following year for two weeks. At that time the Elder Anatole (Potapov) lived in the Optina Monastery itself; while Theodosius, the superior of the skete, and Fr. Nectarius lived in the skete about a half mile away from the monastery. A certain priest who was close to Optina characterized the spiritual personality of each of these Elders with a single word: "Theodosius, the sage; Anatole, the comforter; and the wondrous Nectarius." Fathers Anatole and Theodosius died in the first years of the Revolution, while Fr. Nectarius lived longer than all the others. He died in 1928, outside of the monastery when it had already been officially closed. My late mother and younger brother[1] would visit him several times a year, until the Elder's very death. And thus, through them, while already abroad, I had an opportunity to communicate with Fr. Nectarius, since during this period people were still permitted to correspond with relatives. But soon after Fr. Nectarius' death there ensued a long period of silence, and it was only during the war, in 1944, that the news arrived that my mother had died, having been tonsured a nun with the name of Nectaria, in memory of her Elder.

The ascetic labors of the Optina Monastery followed the ancient teaching of hesychasts; these practices were also known as "sobriety," or "mental activity." They originated when monasticism was first established during the time of Sts. Anthony the Great, Macarius of Egypt, John of the Ladder, and others. In later centuries the teachers of spiritual prayer were St. Gregory of Sinai

1. The future Bishop Nektary Kontzevitch *(editor)*.

ELDER NECTARIUS OF OPTINA
spiritual father of the author.
An aquarelle by the author's sister Vera.

(†1346), a number of patriarchs of Constantinople, St. Gregory Palamas (†1360) the Archbishop of Thessalonica and other outstanding men of Byzantium, Bulgaria and Serbia; and later the Russian St. Nilus of Sora (†1508) and St. Paisius Velichkovsky (1722 - 1794).

The period when ascetic labors flourished among monastics also saw the spiritual rebirth of the entire Church, while the decline of such labors usually marked the decline of her spiritual life in general. Mental activity accompanied by eldership began in the early days of monasticism; but in the course of time they would start to flourish, reaching a significant development, and then would weaken or even sink into oblivion altogether, only to come to life again like the curve of a wave, now rising, now falling, and then rising again.

Thus, ascetic labor was forgotten also in Russia during the time of St. Paisius Velichkovsky in the 18th century. But this great Elder revived the spiritual practice of prayer and eldership, and they began to spread again throughout Russia's monasteries.

Although this meant the rebirth of ancient tradition in Russia itself, the majority of people considered these ascetic exercises, and the work of elders in particular, as incomprehensible innovations. Fr. Sergius Chetverikov says that the monastic activity of Russian elders has been insufficiently explored, and was not appreciated in pre-Revolutionary Russian society.[2] However, it has not been this society alone that has held only vague notions about elders; our new theological literature has not had time yet to delve into this problem. Professor Serebryansky writes: "The question of elders in ancient Russian monasteries has remained completely untouched in our scholarly literature. But judging by the Lives of the saints, eldership must have been *widespread*."[3]

As he became more closely involved with literature on elders and the Jesus Prayer, the author of the present work encountered certain opinions which were not the result of scholarly research, but were simply expressed *a priori*, and were often referred to as a case already established by scholars. Among these there is one about a break of ancient Russian sanctity with the Eastern tradition, which break allegedly occurred in the 14th and 15th centuries. At that time on Mt. Athos and in Byzantium people witnessed the flowering of contemplative endeavors which in the 14th century became known as "hesychasm." However, according to this *a priori* assertion, hesychasm could not reach us "for historical and geographical" reasons, and therefore the character of ancient Russian asceticism had, from then on, developed independently and in a unique manner, forming "a special branch of Orthodox sanctity."

2. Archpriest Sergius Chetverikov, "The History of Russian Eldership," in *Put* (Paris, September, 1925), p. 99.

3. S. Smirnov, *Ancient Russian Spiritual Father-Confessors* (Moscow, 1913), p. 26.

One more circumstance should be noted here – an almost generally negative or at best indifferent, attitude toward hesychasm. This was noted both during the last century and at the beginning of the present century.[4] It is only recently that an interest in hesychasm has begun to emerge. This could be explained by the fact that Russian theology, which began to develop during Peter I's reforms under the influence of Western humanism, had not yet found its own direction. Western countries, on the other hand, from the very beginning of the so-called hesychast controversy of the 14th century, assumed negative attitudes towards this teaching. Moreover, during the last century, as a reaction following the reign of Alexander I and the preoccupation of certain people with Western mysticism, any kind of mysticism, even Orthodox mysticism, was approached with fear. As Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky says: "Out of fear of mystical confusion and loss of balance people began to turn aside from the exhortations of both Macarius of Egypt and Isaac the Syrian, and the practice of mental prayer was abolished and ridiculed as a contagion and a pest."[5] Speaking of Peter's reign and pointing to the fact that "even theology was fashioned after the Western model" the professor notes the existence of a break in Church consciousness, "a break between theological scholarship and the actual experience of the Church."[6] This situation has continued up to our days. This leaning towards the West began a long time ago and progressed gradually. The

4. Let us, for example, consider the academic course in Patrology offered by Archbishop Philaret Gumilevsky (1805-1866): "Historical Teaching About the Church Fathers." The author prudently avoids analyzing the writings of the Holy Fathers on the subject of mental prayer. They are mentioned only in footnotes or are included in the general list. Even in a later period, in *Manual for Clergy* by S. V. Bulgakov (Kiev, 1913, p. 1622), hesychasts are spoken of as "being distinguished by the most unusual kind of dreaminess. They considered the navel as the center of spiritual energies and, consequently, the center of contemplation; and they thought that by lowering their chin towards the chest and gazing at the navel they would percieve the light of Paradise and rejoice in seeing celestial inhabitants. They considered this quiet concentration at one point as an indispensable condition for the perception of Uncreated Light." Due to the patronage of Emperor Andronicus Paleologus the Younger and the defense of St. Gregory Palamas, the hesychasts had victory over the Council of Constantinople in 1341, but "the outrageous opinion of the hesychasts concerning the reception of Uncreated Light was soon given over to oblivion." Bulgakov's book – this official handbook which was offered to all the clergy of such a large Orthodox land and which went through such severe spiritual censorship – demonstrates such complete ignorance of the question of hesychasm, naively repeating an old slander that had been levelled by its enemy Barlaam as far back as the 14th century.

5. Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology* (Paris, 1937), p. 171.

6. *Ibid*., p. 101.

moment of crisis was reached during the fall of Byzantium, when Moscow piety became doubtful of the purity of Greek piety.[7] Considering the break created "between theological scholarship and the actual experience of the Church," little interest in the study of Russian sanctity existed. It was historians who began exploring material on the Lives of saints. Thus, Professor Kliuchevsky in his famous work, *Ancient Russian Lives of Saints As a Source of History* (1871), has done a great deal of research on the Lives [of saints] exclusively for historical purposes. He explored over 150 documents on the Lives, seeking to extract from them historical data, but the results did not satisfy him. His task was continued, although primarily with regard to the saints of the North, by Yakhontov, who arrived at even less satisfactory results. From that time on scholars lost all interest in the Lives, until Professor Kadlubovsky, at the beginning of the 20th century once again returned to them, studying them as literary documents. Exploring the moral and religious views of the epoch, he would encounter expressions such as "inner work" or "spiritual activity" and the like, but paying tribute to his own time he was not interested in coming to terms with the essence of hesychasm and did not suspect that he was dealing with a specific terminology that had an entire school behind it.

In 1898, in Kiev, K. Radchenko's book *Religious and Literary Movements in Bulgaria Before the Turkish Invasion* was published. The work was entirely in the spirit of the time. Radchenko accused hesychasts of "pantheism" on the grounds that in the contemplation of God a man could somehow lose hold of his individual existence and fall into heresy. Besides, he stated, by shifting emphasis to the inward life, hesychasts were weakening Church authority. He decisively placed himself on the side of "Western rationalistic scholasticism" and

7. "And thus it happens," says Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky, "that theological discourse takes place only in the West. Theology is in essence a problem to be worked out by catholicity, but it was tackled only in schism. This is a basic paradox in the history of Christian culture. The West engages in theological discourse, while the East keeps silent, or, what is even worse, unthinkingly and belatedly repeats the pattern of alien discourse" (*ibid.*, p. 515). Pointing to the root of the existing situation, Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky says: "The crisis of Russian Byzantinism experienced in the 16th century marks also the falling away of Russian thought from the patristic tradition in theology; patristic style and method were lost. It is not enough to know patristic texts and to know how to choose the needed references and proofs. One should understand patristic theology from within. Intuition is probably more important than erudition: it alone can resurrect and revive the ancient texts and turn them into a 'witness'" (p. 506). "The reestablishment of patristic style is the first and basic postulate of the rebirth of Russian theology. It is not a matter of some kind of 'restoration' or simple repetition; nor of a return 'to the Fathers'; whatever comes, it must always be forward and not backwards. It is a matter of loyalty to the patristic spirit, not just to the letter; it is a matter of taking fire from the patristic flame, rather than 'herborizing' the ancient texts [collecting them as one collects plants]" (p. 506).

against "extravagant theosophic mysticism," etc. Somewhat later however, in the same year, the first part (600 pages) of a large five-volume work by P. Syrkou *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria in the 14th Century* was published. This work was the result of profound scholarly research of the issue. In writing about the life and teaching of St. Gregory of Sinai, he revealed the true significance of hesychasm as the highest manifestation of the spiritual life of the Church. In his work, P. Syrkou evaluated Radchenko's book in the following words: "Given the position that some medieval mystics, hesychasts in particular, were depressed by the deadly dogmas of Christianity, Radchenko tried everywhere to seek out points of contact between hesychast and heretical teaching, and as a result he reached a false conclusion which was, moreover, not quite clearly expressed. This was the main purpose of Radchenko's book. All the remaining sections of the book were very weak."[8] It was also Radchenko who came up with the opinion, already mentioned above, that hesychasm of the 14th century could not possibly have reached Russia for "historical and geographical" reasons. This hypothesis has survived until now; hence, only its acceptance could have enabled Professor Fedotov to surmise the existence of a unique Russian sanctity – although what it is that constitutes this uniqueness has so far remained unclarified. He says: "They usually link our eldership or our fools-for-Christ with the *Philokalia*, casting bridges across a millenium and bypassing a completely unknown, or seemingly known sanctity of ancient Russia. Strange as it may be, the task of exploring Russian sanctity as a unique tradition of spiritual life has never been undertaken." In his last book, published in 1948 in New York in English, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, Professor Fedotov writes as follows:

"In the middle of the 19th century the evangelical and humanitarian tendencies which largely dominated Russian secular literature tempted the ascetic spirituality of the Church. The slavophiles, a liberal national party in the Church, tried to create (or, rather, to resuscitate) a spirituality based on social ethic. But the breach between the ascetic-mystical and the evangelical elements within the Church widened, and each tendency found political expression in the period immediately preceding the Revolution. The evangelicals[9] stood for ecclesiastical reforms and allied themselves with the liberal political groups of the nation; the mystics supported the absolutism of the Tsar as a remnant of Byzantine tradition. The reformers and liberals did not succeed in developing a type of spirituality of their own deep enough to counterbalance the reactionary, or 'black'

8. P. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria in the 14th Century*, first edition, no. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1898), p. 6.

9. This term probably refers to the "Living Church."

influence of monasticism, and this dualism played a fatal part in the disintegration of the moral forces of pre-Revolutionary Russian society."[10]

Thus, both mysticism and sanctity, as viewed by Professor Fedotov, are reduced to phenomena of an already purely subjective nature, fully determined by the spirit of the epoch.

The negative attitude toward hesychasm, however, is being gradually replaced by the reestablishment of its true meaning not only in Orthodoxy but also among certain Western scholars. In 1930, in the Paris edition *Byzantine Art Among the Slavs* there appeared an article by a professor of Belgrade University, Milos Vasich, in which he explored the influence of hesychasm upon Serbian medieval art. He wrote that to perform this task he had, first of all, to use a strictly archeological method and, secondly, to recognize hesychasm as "a teaching of the official Church," repudiating "the still existing preconceived notion that maintained that hesychasm was nothing more than a sectarian teaching. . . ." "For a long time there existed an incorrect notion about hesychasm, but lately excellent apologists have been found (here Vasich means Western scholars) who have brought to attention the existence of this movement and presented it as it really was."

Thus, for instance, Helzer considers the struggle which arose over hesychasm to be "one of the most amazing phenomena of all times and one of the most interesting in the history of civilization, despite the generally accepted tale which is being taught in (Western) universities and seminaries under the name of "Church History," and which has never ceased pouring cheap mockery over hesychasm and thus only proving its complete misunderstanding of the most serious problem in the history of ideas." Professor Vasich further presents arguments offered by Hall, who "unhesitatingly regards the controversy over hesychasm, which has acquired such a bad reputation in the West, as the most significant moment in the history of the Greek Church. It was then for the first time that the Church became aware that she had treasured within herself this monastic enthusiasm which drew its strength from her bosom. It was clear that all dogmatic conclusions and arguments, hitherto apparently forgotten, had once again arisen in the society of that period. Learned theologians of the two camps were locked in this struggle, their dialectics bearing witness to the onset of a new rebirth of philosophy."

In 1936 Professor Ignatius Smolitch's book *The Life and Teaching of the Elders* (*Leben und Lehre der Startzen*, Vienna) came out in German. This book

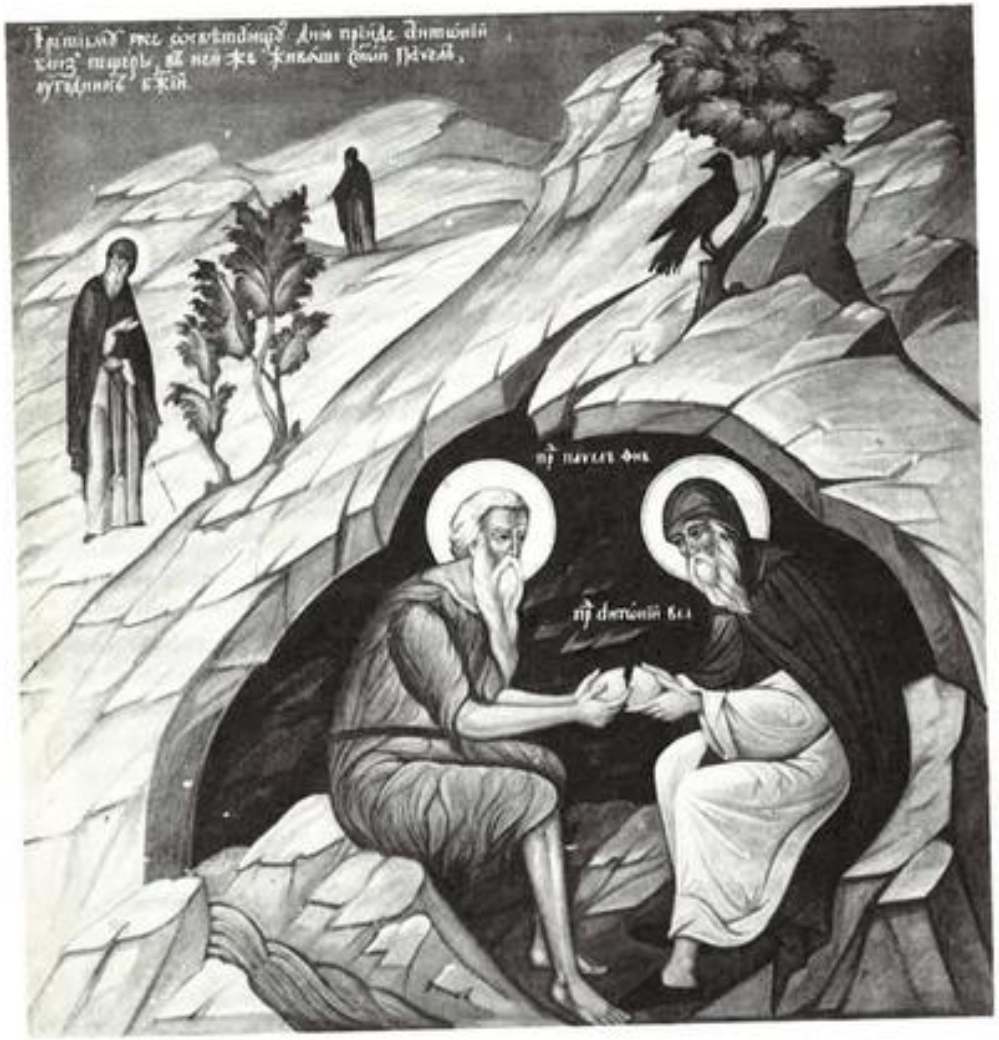
10. G. P. Fedotov, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* [in English] (New York, 1948), pp. 15-16.

has also failed to contribute anything new towards shedding light on the problem of the nature of ancient Russian sanctity. Dr. Smolitch, like the others, supported the notion of the unique nature of Russian sanctity when he said that "experiences of a contemplative nature do not form a part of the essence of Russian ascetic practice except among a few Russian saints, only a few of whom could be called mystics." The virtue of his book, however, lies in the fact that the author's comprehensive examination and systematization of Orthodox mystical theology presents a clear idea about it and its correct characteristics.

Finally, hesychasm has found its complete and finite justification in the dissertation of Professor Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern) in *The Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, published in 1950 in Paris. The author defends hesychasm with all the power of his scholarly erudition and offers a comprehensive investigation of the material relating to the problem in one way or another.

My first-hand acquaintance with the literature dealing with our topic shows that the nature of ancient Russian sanctity, eldership and its meaning still remains unclarified. I proceeded in the present study to present still more material on the subject, with the hope of achieving greater clarification. The historical part was organized as follows: as many Lives of Saints were explored as was possible (including Lives of monk-saints). The data obtained was organized chronologically, which helped to establish the character of the periods and the link of ancient Russian asceticism with that of the East.

This work is a further development of the candidate's thesis (1948) written under the guidance of a professor of the Theological Institute in Paris, A. V. Kartashev, to whom I am profoundly grateful for his lively interest in the subject and his serious criticism.



ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT
searching for and finding St. Paul of Thebes.

A fresco by Archimandrite Cyprian (Pyzhov) from the refectory of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York.

PART I

(Introductory)

A Brief Survey of Asceticism

(The Essence of "Inward Activity")

Banished from the Joys of Paradise, Adam sat outside and wept, and beating his hands upon his face he said: I am fallen, in Thy compassion have mercy on me.

When Adam saw the Angel drive him out and shut the door of the divine garden, he groaned aloud and said: I am fallen, in Thy compassion have mercy on me.

O Paradise, share in the sorrow of thy master who is brought to poverty, and with the sound of thy leaves pray to the Creator that He may not keep thy gate closed forever. I am fallen, in Thy compassion have mercy on me.

(Ikos for the Forgiveness Sunday Matins)

ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV WITH N. A. MOTOVILOV

An illustration from the book St. Seraphim of Sarov *by A. P. Timofievich, published by New Diveyevo Convent, Spring Valley, New York.*

INTRODUCTION

PATRISTIC THEOLOGY is comprised of the works of the Church Fathers, as well as the service books of the Church. The wonderful harmony of these chants of the most exalted and pure poetry flows with ease, penetrating to the very depths of the soul. During the Matins of the Sunday before Lent, vivid and inimitable images speak of the state of the fallen Adam, expelled from Paradise and weeping over his "degradation": "I who was once king of all God's creatures upon earth have now become a prisoner. . . ." "I . . . must now, as one condemned to die, wrap myself miserably in skins of mortality." We all, the children of Adam, are prisoners of sin. The purpose of the way of asceticism is to cast off "the skins of mortality" and to become clothed in the grace of the Holy Spirit – the garment of the New Adam – which is Christ.

Before his Fall, Adam was inwardly collected by the divine grace inherent in him and he was creatively aspiring to reach God through perfect love for Him and conformance to His divine will. He was wholly immersed in contemplation of God and in communion with God. All manifestations of the triune nature of man (*i.e.*, the spirit, the soul and the body) harmoniously unified in him, hierarchically submitted to the highest principle within man – to his spirit. The spirit ruled over all aspects of human nature, directing them towards the single highest purpose. The first man was wholly filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and emanated light, like St. Seraphim during his conversation with Moto-

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vilov.[1] The elements of the world were unable to harm man and he was immortal. Sin, this sting of death, introduced the poison of disintegration and corruption into the nature of man. Divine grace, which had until then protected and integrated him, now abandoned him. All the energies of his soul were now in the state of confusion and contradiction. The flesh rebelled against the spirit – the slave against his master. Thus, the order of man's soul became distorted, and there appeared a confused human being, the man of sin. Passion is not something new, brought in from without, but a redirection of former qualities and abilities from what is proper to what is wrong. Thus, the highest manifestation of the spirit, its ability to aspire to the most holy, towards God, upon the loss of communion with the Divine, turned downwards and exchanged these aspirations for the love of oneself and all things lowly and created.

In this way, self-love, egoism and other passions replaced by themselves the love for God. Theocentrism gave way to egocentrism. Left to his own resources, fallen man was now unable to arise through his own natural strength and to free himself of contradictions, passions, sin and suffering, to leave this vicious circle of death and the feeling of being abandoned by God. He began feeling the need for supernatural assistance. Thousands of years went by before the Redeemer appeared. St. John of Kronstadt said: "Before He became flesh, the Lord allowed man to experience all the bitterness of sin, all his helplessness in eradicating it; and when everyone cried out for the Savior – He appeared, the wise and powerful Physician and Helper. When truth became scarce and people began to hunger and thirst for it, then came the Truth eternal."[2] St. John of Damascus said: "By His birth, by becoming flesh, as well as through His baptism, suffering and resurrection, He delivered human nature from the forefather's sin, from death and corruption; He became the source of resurrection and declared Himself the Way, the image and the example, so that we, following in His footsteps and through adoption by Him, might become what He is by His nature: the sons and heirs of God and His co-heirs."[3] Thus Christ became the only mighty *power* of people's salvation (Rom. 1:4, I Cor. 1:24), *the captain of their salvation* (Heb. 2:10), the only *way* to God (John 14:6). Life in Christ is achieved through

1. "The original state of Adam before the Fall is considered to have been particularly perfect. Adam was 'clothed in glory,' in 'divine radiance and brilliance,' and 'partook of the Divine Light' (St. Gregory Palamas). The Transfiguration on Mount Tabor showed to the Apostles both the future glory of the Kingdom of God and the state of the pre-Fall paradisaical bliss lost by Adam." Professor Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern), *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas* (Paris, 1950), p. 403.

2. Archpriest John Sergiev (St. John of Kronstadt), *My Life in Christ*, Book I (Moscow), p. 158.

3. S. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2 (St. Petersburg, 1907), pp. 32-33.

the Holy Mysteries. "Through the Holy Mysteries, as if through little windows, the Sun of Truth penetrates this dark world, destroying the life of this world and restoring the pre-worldly life; the Light of the world overcomes the world, as indicated by the Savior: *I have overcome the world.*" We will quote Archbishop Nicholas Cabasilas of Thessalonica (†1371) from his theological work on the meaning of the Mysteries – *The Life in Christ*. He compares human life with the seed of a plant put into the soil: "Truly this world carries the new inner man created in the image of God; being conceived here and fully formed, he is born in the other, unaging world. . . ." "The life in Christ," he says, "is conceived and begins in the present life, but is accomplished in the future life, when our day comes. . . . But even after death one will not partake of good things in heaven, if he has not acquired the necessary energies and feelings while living on earth; he will be an unhappy and dead man in a happy and immortal world, the reason being that, although light will be shining there abundantly, one will need the eyes to perceive this light, and the sense of smell to perceive the fragrance pervading there. Only the Holy Mysteries may give birth to the organs of perception of spiritual life, which 'on that day' would enable man to enter into communion with Christ and His friends, and to learn from Him what He heard from the Father. However, one should come to Him being His friend and having ears. One will not be able to befriend anyone there, nor to open his ears and prepare the wedding garment, because the present life (on earth) is given for such preparations; and those who will be lacking all this before departing from this life, will have nothing in common with the future life."

In His Mysteries, the Lord "being the Nurturer, is at the same time the Nourishment; He gives the bread of life, being the bread Himself. He is the life of the living, the myrrh of those who breathe, and the garment of those who wish to be appropriately attired. It is only with Him that we can walk, because He is the Way, the Rest on the Way and its Destination."[4] But one should not restrict oneself to a mechanical assimilation of the Mysteries. It is essential that one desire them and make an effort, of which Christ spoke: *The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force* (Matt. 11:12). Salvation requires cooperation between grace and the free will of man, who should choose the way of ascetic struggles.

Let us examine the meaning of the concept of "asceticism." According to the research done by Professor Zarin, ἀσκόι, as used by Homer, denoted wineskin. Philologists assume that ἀσκέω meant treatment of skin. Later "ascesis"

4. Nicholas Cabasilas, *La Vie en Jesus Christ (The Life in Jesus Christ)* (Prieure d' Amay sur Meuse, 1932), 236 pp.

meant gymnastic exercises, and still later in philosophy it meant achieving virtue by means of exercises. The Apostle Paul (I Cor. 9:24-27) used this concept in two contemporary meanings: training as exercise to win in competitive games, and spiritual exercise designed to combat vice and develop virtue. In patristic writings the term "ascesis" was commonly used in the meaning of: fasting, praying, solitude, vigil and other endeavors and deprivations.

Christian religions vary in their attitude towards asceticism. The Roman Catholic Church regards it as a discipline compulsory for monastics, and something "over and above the norm" for lay people. Protestant Churches simply reject asceticism. Orthodox teaching, however, is that asceticism, although to various extents and to various forms, is obligatory for all Christians without exception, according to the words of the Savior, Who requires that His followers make an effort.[5]

5. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2, pp. 1-15.

Chapter One

THE ORDER OF SPIRITUAL ASCENT

THE WAY TO GOD leads through knowledge of oneself. "No one can know God without knowing himself," repeats St. Athanasius the Great after St. Anthony the Great. The knowledge of oneself is the greatest of sciences, since no one who has not mastered it will ever know God. An ascetic needs to have the knowledge of spiritual and psychological laws and a deep insight into his own soul. Usually, however, people suffer from blindness and self-delusion and are unable to see their fallen state. Therefore, becoming aware of one's own true state and of evil within oneself is the first step towards knowledge of oneself. On this path towards impassibility, however, an ascetic is faced with a very difficult and long warfare against passions, and with an acquisition of virtues. This is a gradual process and must be accomplished in the proper order. St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century) says: "Every virtue is the mother of the one following it. If one should leave the mother who is giving birth to other virtues, and aspire to seek out the daughters before attaining their mother, these virtues turn into vipers within one's soul. If one dismisses them, one will soon die."[1] Thus, spiritual perfection is attained gradually and in a definite order, like building a house. On its foundation of faith one should place the stones of obedience, endurance, abstinence, and on these – the stones of compassion, renunciation of one's own will, etc., the cornerstones being patience and courage, which give the house its

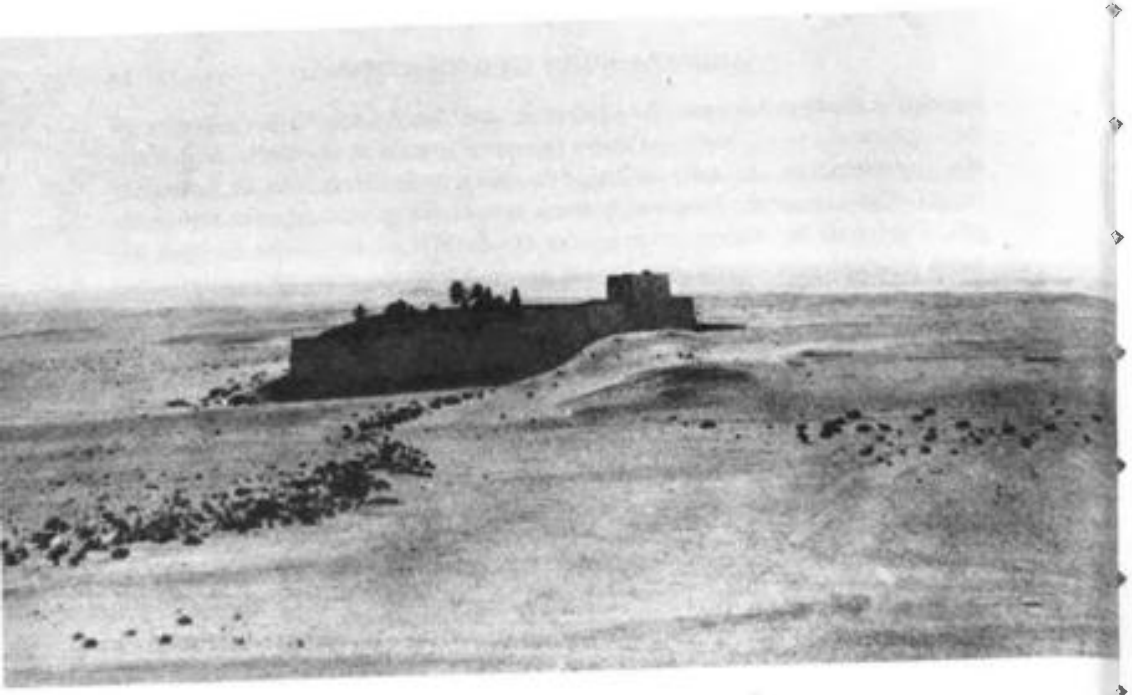
1. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Works* (Sergiev Posad, 1893), p. 363.

firm stability. Like a cement holding everything together, so is humility, without which not a single good deed is an act of virtue, nor is it possible to be saved.[2] "*Humility* is Christ's spiritual doctrine, noetically introduced into the inner chamber of the soul by those who are accounted worthy of it. It cannot be defined by perceptible words."[3] The Lord says of Himself: *For I am meek and lowly in heart* (Matt. 11:29). "Learn not from an angel, nor from man, nor from a book, but from Me, that is, from My indwelling, from My illumination and action in you."[4] The Holy Mother of God speaks of her humility: *For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden* (Luke 1:48). According to St. John of the Ladder there are three degrees of humility. The first belongs to those who have achieved dispassion, the second to those who are manly-minded, and the third – the lower – is indispensable to all Christians.[5] "Without humility, no one will enter the bridal chamber."[6] "Humility is a heavenly siphon from which the abyss of sins can raise the soul to heaven."[7] For "humility even without good deeds renders many sins pardonable, because without humility all our good deeds, all the various virtues and actions, are futile."[8] One can attain humility only through experience. When practicing mental prayer and spiritual struggles, man becomes convinced that despite all his efforts he is helpless. It is then that he actually becomes aware of God's help and afraid to lose it through his self-reliance; therefore he ascribes nothing to himself, but everything to God alone, referring to his endeavors as follows: "I have done only what I was commanded to do, worthless slave that I am."[9] "If anyone says: 'I am rich, I am satisfied with what I have acquired, and have no need for more' – he is not a Christian, but a vessel of *prelest* (delusion) and of Satan. One cannot ever have enough happiness in God; and to what extent he tastes and partakes of it, to that extent he thirsts for more. Such people are full of fervor and irrepressible love for God. The more they strive to accomplish and acquire in their fervor, the more they consider themselves as being poor and having acquired nothing. They think: I am unworthy for this sun to shine upon me. This is the true mark of Christianity – this is humility."[10] Such is the self-awareness of an Orthodox ascetic, and herein

2. According to Abba Dorotheos, in Zarin, *Asceticism*, p. 12.
3. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1898), Step 25, verse 41.
4. *Ibid.*, verse 3.
5. *Ibid.*, verse 49.
6. *Ibid.*, verse 52.
7. *Ibid.*, verse 68.
8. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Works*, Homily 46, p. 202.
9. *Cf.* Luke 17:10 *(editor)*.
10. St. Macarius of Egypt, *Homilies* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1904), p. 129.

lies the difference between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic points of view. The concept of "over and above the norm" merits are inadmissible in Eastern understanding. As early as the 5th century, St. Hesychius of Jerusalem taught: "The Heavenly Kingdom is not a reward for good deeds, but rather the gift of grace of the Master, prepared for His faithful slaves. A slave does not demand freedom as a reward; but having received it he expresses his gratitude as a debtor, and not having received it, he waits for it as for alms."[11] A true ascetic does not demonstrate his humility; he does not show off or talk humility. "The most dangerous kind of pride is to think of oneself as a humble person; when a man takes his pride for humility, it cannot be easily eradicated."[12]

11. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 399.
12. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I (St. Petersburg, 1865), pp. 619-620.



ANCIENT DESERT MONASTERIES
where ascetic struggle has been practiced for fifteen centuries.

Above: the Monastery of St. Macarius the Great in Scetis of the Egyptian Thebaid, as it looks today.
Below: the Monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified in Palestine, near Bethlehem. *An aquarelle painted in 1839.*

Chapter Two

THE STRUGGLE WITH PASSIONS

PASSIONS, LIKE VIRTUES, are also interconnected, just as "links of a single chain" (St. Isaac of Nitria), one being an offshoot of another. There are eight of them; in the order of birth they are as follows: 1) gluttony, 2) lust, 3) avarice, 4) anger, 5) despondency, 6) despair, 7) vainglory, and 8) pride.

The main concern of patristic asceticism is not with external manifestations of sin, nor individual instances of sin, but rather with their cause, *i.e.*, the vices and passions rooted in the soul, or diseases of the soul and hidden inner states of sin. Using contemporary terms and concepts, Professor Zarin expounds the teaching of the Holy Fathers about the psychology of passion and the struggle with it. Here is a brief resume of this exposition.

A thought is the initial moment in the emergence of a passion; it is a moment of hesitation and an essential central element of this psychological state.[1] The essence of asceticism amounts to the struggle with thoughts. The Holy Fathers, ascetics, discern as many as [six or] seven moments in the development and growth of passions.

1. PROVOCATION (SUGGESTION)

The first impetus to the emergence of the psychological phenomenon which may end as passion is known as a "provocation" or "suggestion" (*prilog*).

1. There are three main moments: 1) the appearance of a concept, 2) the adding to it of the feeling, and 3) the adding to it of the will. (Mind, feeling, will: a concept, in conjunction with feeling and with the addition of the will.)

It is a conception of an object or an action corresponding to one of the stained inclinations within a person. Under the influence of external impressions, or in connection with the psychological working of the memory or imagination according to the laws of association, this provocation enters the sphere of man's consciousness. This first moment takes place independently of man's free will, against his wish, without his participation, in accordance with the laws of psychological inevitability – "spontaneity" – and is, therefore, considered "innocent" or dispassionate. It does not incriminate man in sin if it is not caused by his "wandering" thoughts, if it is not invited consciously and voluntarily, and if a person is not negligent about it. This is the touchstone for testing our will, to see whether it will be inclined towards virtue or vice. It is in this choice that the free will of man manifests itself.[2]

2. CONJUNCTION

Provocation evokes the response of the *feeling*, which reacts to the impression or image intruding upon the consciousness by either "love" or "hate" (sympathy or antipathy). This is the most important moment, for it decides the fate of the provoking thought: will it stay, or will it flee? It is only the emergence of this thought in the consciousness that occurs regardless of the will of man. If it is not immediately rejected and lingers on, this means that in the nature of a given person it finds compatable ground, which is expressed in his sympathetic reaction to the provocation. Sympathetic inclination attracts *attention*, allowing the suggested thought to grow and turn into an image of fantasy pervading the entire sphere of consciousness and ousting all other impressions and thoughts. Attention lingers at the thought because man *delights* in it. This second moment is called *conversation* or *conjunction* (*sochetanie*). St. Ephraim the Syrian defines it as a "free acceptance of the thought, its entertainment, as it were, and a conversation with it accompanied by delight." In the contemporary language of psychology this means that the second moment in the development of the thought lies in the following: man's attention is directed exclusively to the newly arisen impression or notion, which serves as an impetus or cause for the development of a whole series of associated notions. These notions give man the feeling of pleasure while anticipating the enjoyment of the object of the impression or notion obtained. In order to cut off the sequence of notions, to remove it from his consciousness, and to terminate the feeling of delight, man

2. There are two causes for the occurrence of "provocation": natural causes and evil spirits.

needs to *distract* his attention by the effort of his will. He must actively and firmly resolve to rebut the images of sin assailing him and not return to them again.

3. JOINING

Otherwise, with the absence of willful rejection of the intruding images, the third moment is induced, when the will itself becomes increasingly attracted to the thought, and as a result man becomes *inclined* to act upon what the thought tells him and to get the satisfaction of partaking of it. At this time the equilibrium of his spiritual life is totally destroyed, the soul wholly surrenders itself to the thought and *strives* to realize it with the purpose of experiencing an even more intense delight. Thus, the third moment is characterized by the *inclination of will* towards the object of the thought, by its agreement and resolve to realize pleasurable fantasies. Consequently, in the third moment the whole will surrenders to the thought and now acts according to its directives in order to realize its fantastic plans. This moment, called *joining* (*slozhenie*), is the cooperation of the will, which is a declaration of agreement with the passion whispered by the thought (St. Ephraim the Syrian), or *consent* of the soul to what has been presented to it by the thought, accompanied by delight (St. John of the Ladder). This state is already "approaching the act of sin and is akin to it" (St. Ephraim the Syrian). There comes the willful *resolve* to attain the realization of the object of the passionate thought by all means available to man. In principle, the decision has already been made to satisfy the passion. Sin has already been committed in intention. It now remains to satisfy the sinful desire, turning it into a concrete act.

4. STRUGGLE

Sometimes, however, before man's final decision to proceed to this last moment, or even after such a decision, he experiences a struggle between the sinful desire and the opposite inclination of his nature.

5. HABIT

However, the last psychological moment of an unstable vacillation of the will between opposing inclinations takes place only when the *habit* has not yet been formed within the soul, namely, the "bad habit" of responding to the evil thought. It takes place when a sinful inclination has not yet deeply penetrated

man's nature and become a constant feature of his character, a familiar element of his disposition, when his mind is constantly preoccupied with the object of the passionate urge, when the passion itself has not yet been completely formed.

6. CAPTIVITY

When in the power of passion, man gladly and violently rushes to satisfy this passion, either without any struggle at all, or almost without a struggle. He is losing the dominant, guiding and controlling power of his volitional faculty over individual inclinations and demands of volitional nature. It is no longer the will that rules over sinful inclinations, but the latter rule over the will, forcibly and wholly enticing the soul, compelling its entire rational and active energy to concentrate on the object of passion. This state is called *captivity* (*plenenie*). This is the moment of the complete development of a passion, of the fully established state of the soul, which now manifests all of its energy to the utmost.[3]

"The best and the most successful struggle takes place when the thought is cut off by means of an unceasing prayer at the very start. For, as the Fathers have said, whoever opposes the *initial thought*, *i.e.*, the provocation, will stop its subsequent disposition at once. A wise ascetic destroys the mother of wicked fiends, *i.e.*, the cunning provocation (first thoughts). At the time of prayer, above all else, one's intellect should be rendered deaf and mute (St. Nilus of Sinai), and one's heart emptied of any thoughts, even a seemingly good thought (St. Hesychius of Jerusalem). Experience has shown that the admission of a dispassionate thought, *i.e.*, a distraction, is followed by an impassioned (wicked) one, and that the entry of the first opens the door to the latter."[4]

This inner struggle is vividly portrayed to us by St. Hesychius of Jerusalem (5th century), a disciple of St. Gregory the Theologian:

No. 145. Our mind, being something of light appearance and innocent, easily gives itself over to daydreaming and is unrestrainedly subject to evil thoughts, if it does not have in itself such a concept which, like a monarch over the passions, holds it constantly under control and bridles it.

No. 168. A ship does not move without water; and there is no progress whatsoever in the guarding of the mind without sobriety with humility and prayer to Jesus Christ.

No. 169. Stones are used for the foundation of a house; but for this virtue (the guarding of the mind) both the foundation and the root are the holy

3. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2, pp. 248-258.
4. *St. Nilus of Sora* (Moscow, 1869), p. 19.

and venerable name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Quickly and easily can a foolish captain wreck his ship during a storm, dismissing the sailors, throwing the sails and oars into the sea, and going to sleep himself; but much more quickly can the soul be drowned by the demons if, when the thoughts begin to emerge, it does not guard sobriety, and invoke the name of Jesus Christ.

No. 94. Sobriety and the Jesus Prayer mutually reinforce one another; for extreme watchfulness goes with the content of constant prayer, while prayer goes with extreme sobriety and watchfulness of intellect.

No. 88. Many of our thoughts come from demonic suggestions, and from these derive our evil outward actions. If with the help of Jesus we instantly quell the thought, we will avoid its corresponding outward action. We will enrich ourselves with the sweetness of divine knowledge and so will find God, Who is everywhere. Holding the mirror of the intellect firmly towards God, we will be illumined constantly as pure glass is by the sun. Then finally the intellect, having reached the limit of its desires, will in Him cease from all other contemplation.[5]

5. St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, *Exhortations on Watchfulness and Prayer* (Moscow, 1890). [English translation in *The Philokalia* (G. E. H. Palmer, et al.), Vol. I.]

VISION OF THE HEAVENLY LADDER

St. John Climacus stands at the foot of the Ladder, guiding monks up its steps.

Icon of the Moscow School, 16th century.

Chapter Three

PRAYER

The virtue of prayer performs the mystery of our union with God; it is the tie of rational creatures with their Creator (St. Gregory Palamas) and *is the leader of the host of virtues. Not one of them is stable without prayer.* (St. Gregory of Nyssa)

1. THE JESUS PRAYER, ANCIENT AND UNCEASING

BESIDES ST. HESYCHIUS OF JERUSALEM (5th century), other ancient Church Fathers also dealt with the Jesus Prayer. This was also pointed out by Ivan V. Kireyevsky in his letter (1855) to Elder Macarius of Optina: "Because some Western theologians disclaim the ancientness of this prayer (the unceasing Prayer of Jesus), it would be a good idea to point out the references in patristic writings which relate to the Prayer either directly or by allusion." With regard to the Jesus Prayer, Kireyevsky found advice given by St. Barsanuphius the Great (6th century) in his Answer no. 39. In no. 126 it is given in full: "Unceasing calling upon the name of God cures one not only of passions, but also of actions; and as a medicine affects a sick man without his comprehension, similarly the invocation of the name of God destroys passions in a manner beyond our comprehension." No. 424: "The name of Jesus should be invoked not only at the time of temptations, because unceasing calling of God's name is actually prayer." No. 425: "Invocation of God's name stops evil thoughts arising during psalmody,

or prayer, or reading. (Consequently the Jesus Prayer should not cease during the recitation of other prayers. Fr. Seraphim made the same point when speaking to Fr. Archimandrite.)"[1] No. 429: "Not only in invoking God with the lips, but also in remembering Him in the heart, does prayer occur, for God is the knower of hearts and listens to the heart."[2]

The action of God's Name in prayer is explained by the Orthodox teaching on the Names of God:

"1. God's Name is holy, venerable and desirable, because it denotes in words the most aspired to and the holiest of beings – God, the Fount of all good things. This Name is Divine, because it has been revealed to us by God, it speaks to us of God, uplifts our intellect to God, etc. In a prayer (particularly in the Jesus Prayer) the Name of God and God Himself are perceived by us inseparably, as if identifying one another; they cannot and should not be separated or opposed to one another, although this is so only in prayer and only in our hearts. However, in theology as well as in actual fact, God's Name is only a name, not God Himself or His characteristics; it is a name of an object, not the object itself, and therefore it cannot be acknowledged or called either God (which would be absurd and blasphemous), or Divinity, because it is not the Energy of God.

"2. The Name of God, when uttered during prayer with faith, may even perform miracles, but not by itself, not as a consequence of some divine power forever contained in it or attached to it and acting mechanically, but because the Lord, seeing our faith (Matt. 9:2) and by virtue of His true promise, sends His grace and by it performs miracles."[3] (From the Holy Synod's Address of 1913 to monastics, in connection with the "Name-worshipping" heresy which arose in St. Panteleimon Monastery on Mt. Athos.)

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOUL

In order to understand the most profound movement of prayer upon the soul, let us examine its structure. The soul of a man, this "object of his personal life" (Professor Zarin), is distinguished from the soul of an animal by its likeness to God: *Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness* (Gen. 1:26), said God,

1. Fr. Seraphim – this is St. Seraphim of Sarov; Fr. Archimandrite – this is the Superior of the Optina Monastery, Archimandrite Moses who, while still a novice named Timothy, heard St. Seraphim's wonderful exhortation: "When standing in church one should pray with the Jesus Prayer to fully comprehend the church service." *Life of Archimandrite Moses* (Moscow, 1882), p. 12.
2. Chetverikov, *Optina Monastery* (Paris, 1926), pp. 134-135.
3. S. V. Troitsky, *On the Name of God* (St. Petersburg, 1914), p. 10.

and He *breathed* into the man *the breath of life* (Gen. 2:7), the spirit, *pneuma* – the God-like principle in the soul of man. The basic manifestations of the spirit are consciousness and freedom. The life of the soul, all its manifestations, states and feelings occur in the heart. The heart is a direct and unifying organ of life. Man's entire individual life is concentrated in his heart. The heart and the spirit are closely bound in an uninterrupted mutual activity. Activity of the spirit takes place predominantly in the heart, and man's conscience is the result of its action (Rom. 2:15). The source of the highest religious and moral life lies in the spirit, and it is through the spirit that man's living bond with God is established, since the spirit is the organ of *God's witness* (Rom. 8:16). The Spirit of God penetrates man's heart through his spirit and acts in it. Thus, the heart is a vessel of faith and religious consciousness, and conversely, when they are absent the heart may become the source of unbelief and all kinds of sinful states: *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies* (Matt. 15:19). The organ of the spirit is the intellect, and they are closely bound. Its activity manifests itself in apprehension of abstract theoretical principles, as well as moral and practical principles. Due to the effect of the spirit upon it, the intellect is capable of apprehending that which is deposited in the soul, and religious and moral principles. But, as we said before, the heart is the focal point of all man's activities, of his entire life, including also his spirit. Thus, it also comprises and controls the activity of the intellect.

3. THE DESCENT OF THE MIND INTO THE HEART

The heart, or the ability to feel, this "center of life" both physical and spiritual, this "root of the human being," this "focal point of all his spiritual and animal-bodily forces" "lies deeper" than the active capabilities of the soul, namely the mind and the will, constituting as it were their foundation. And since the mind is the contemplative force, while the "heart" embraces the most profound individual experiences, their natural relation must be expressed in terms of constant and unremitting control of the "mind" over the "heart."[4] The intellect

4. "The concept of the heart occupies the central position in mysticism," says Professor Vysheslavtsev. "The heart means a certain depth, a hidden center of a person, wherein lies his value, his eternity. It is only in the mysterious depths of the heart that an encounter with God is possible. One can perceive Christ only with his heart: *Christ may dwell in your heart by faith* (Eph. 3:17). The heart is the center of love, while love is an expression of the deepest essence of a person. . . . It is the center not only of the conscious, but of the unconscious (subconscious) as well; not only of the soul, but also of the spirit; not only of what is comprehensible, but also of what is incomprehensible. The heart is God-like freedom. . . .

must communicate the proper direction to the heart, guarding it from sinful thoughts and leading it to virtuous thoughts. In view of the fact that thoughts emerge in the heart, man's attention should be kept close to or within the heart; this may be defined as "watchfulness of the mind over thoughts." In asceticism, this is termed as "abiding in the heart." The mind, abiding in the heart and watching over thoughts, must lock the attention in the words of the prayer. The forms of prayer are as follows. At first the prayer should be practiced only vocally. Later, as the mind begins to heed the movement of the tongue, the prayer becomes mental. Finally, there may ensue the "descent of the mind into the heart," as the Fathers say. Returning into the heart, the mind elicits the warmth of divine love within it, and thus inspires it to call upon the name of Jesus Christ freely and with inexpressible sweetness, to pray to God unceasingly and with tenderness: *I sleep but my heart waketh* (Song of Solomon 5:2).[5]

This "descent of the mind into the heart," or their union, is interpreted by Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov in the following way: "The heart or the place of the heart, the rational power or the spirit of man, has its seat in the upper part of the heart under the left nipple of the breast, as the mind has its seat in the brain. At the time of prayer the spirit should join the mind; the mind prays in words uttered only mentally, or vocally as well, while prayer of the spirit is expressed by a feeling of tenderness, or by tears. This union is the gift of divine grace; for the beginner, however, it should suffice if his spirit sympathizes and cooperates with the mind. Provided the mind keeps its attention fixed on the prayer, the spirit will certainly experience the feeling of contrition."[6]

Man is like God and he is a little god *(ye are gods)* in his faculty of *freedom*, with which he was initially endowed 'in essence,' in his ability to say 'yes' or 'no,' 'may it be' or 'may it not be,' in the ability to act positively or negatively. This power is the very essence, the mysterious and wondrous essence of every 'I,' of every spirit. . . . At the basis of every act lies freedom (hence the choice between good and evil). The heart is the light of the Logos, the light of self-consciousness in the loftiest mystical sense of the word. . . . Speaking in Plato's language, one may say that the soul itself is the *contemplation of ideas*, and this constitutes its highest essence. It is 'logical' and contemplative. . . . It is not at all only the intellect which comprehends, contemplates and perceives: *comprehension* is broader than thinking, than intellectual knowledge. The heart, too, is the organ of comprehension; it comprehends many things inaccessible even to the intellect; it comprehends sanctity, beauty, value. Besides an intellectual comprehension, there is also an emotional comprehension. We arrive at the initial Biblical meaning of the heart: the heart is the organ of comprehension if we consider the latter in all its breadth and extending beyond the limits of scientific knowledge. In order to comprehend much of what is inaccessible to an isolated intellect, one needs to 'stand with his mind in the heart,' because, in the last analysis, the mind is rooted and centered in the heart, since a person has only one hidden center." B. Vysheslavtsev, *The Heart in Christian and Hindu Mysticism* (Paris, 1929), pp. 5, 9, 65, 67, 69, 70, 75.

5. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2, pp. 372-380, 392-394, 576-586.

6. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 157.

As mentioned above, the attention must abide in the upper part of the heart. The importance and significance of this instruction becomes evident in the following words of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky: "From the very beginning, one should train one's mind to stay, at the hour of prayer, in the upper part of the heart, looking into its depths and not at the side or at the bottom end. This point is important, because when the mind stays praying in the upper region of the heart, it is like a king sitting above his subjects. It can freely observe sinful thoughts splashing below and destroy them like the second babes of Babylon against the rock of Christ's Name. Also, being significantly removed from the loins, it can easily avert the burning desire of the flesh which has become inherent in our nature since Adam's fall into sin."[7]

By way of the continuous induction of God's Name into the soul, Christ's image penetrates man's subconsciousness and then flowers in his consciousness. The soul undergoes the process of transfiguration, beginning with its hidden depth and ending in its own "deification," as expressed in the Apostle's words: *Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* This, then, is the purpose and meaning of the Jesus Prayer.[8]

Prayer and watchfulness are inseparably bound. According to Professor Zarin's definition: "Watchfulness is the 'attention' of the mind towards what takes place in the 'heart' (*i.e.*, in the inner life), attention which is acquired through care, effort and experience, and accompanied by 'vigilance,' *i.e.*, continuous 'guarding' of the heart against sinful movements with the purpose of purifying it."

This ascetic endeavor is also known under various other names, giving it other shades of meaning: "*podvig* and labor of the mind" (St. Macarius the Great, St. John Cassian), "focusing oneself in one place" (St. Isaac the Syrian, St. Basil the Great) or else "self-concentration," "concentration within" (Bishop Theophan the Recluse), "inward activity" (Ancient Patericon, Bishop Theophan the Recluse), "activity of the heart" (Bishop Theophan the Recluse), "hidden activity," "spiritual activity" (St. Hesychius).[9]

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7. *Anthology on the Jesus Prayer* (Valaam Monastery edition, 1936), p. 214; also, *The Life and Writings of the Moldavian Elder Paisius Velichkovsky* (Moscow, 1847), p. 128.

8. *The Way of a Pilgrim* (Paris, 1933), p. 7.

9. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2, p. 587.

ST. (BISHOP) IGNATIUS BRIANCHANINOV
A true teacher of spiritual life and a Holy Father for modern times
(see p. 206).

A daguerreotype made when he was an archimandrite.

Chapter Four

SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATION

THE HOLY FATHERS say that lofty spiritual states are attained only through the "guarding of the mind." According to St. Hesychius: "The guarding of the intellect may appropriately be called 'light-producing,' 'lightning-producing,' 'light-giving' and 'fire-bearing,' for truly it surpasses endless virtues, bodily or otherwise. Because of this, and because of the glorious light to which it gives birth, one must honor this virtue with worthy names. Those who are seized by love for this virtue are enabled, from being worthless sinners, ignorant, profane, uncomprehending and unjust, to become just, responsive, pure, holy and wise through Jesus Christ. Not only this, but they are able to contemplate mystically and theologize; and when they have become contemplatives, they bathe in a sea of pure and infinite light, touching it ineffably and living and dwelling in it. They have tasted *that the Lord is good*."[1]

According to St. Macarius of Egypt, the fire of grace, set aflame in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit, makes them glow like candles before the face of the Son of God.

"Divine fire, in accordance with the will of a person, either flares up into a large flame, or dies down without any reflection in hearts confused by passions. The immaterial and divine fire illumines and tries souls. This fire descended upon the Apostles in the shape of tongues. This fire shone upon St. Paul, spoke

1. St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, *Exhortations on Watchfulness and Prayer*, no. 171.

to him and illumined his mind, blinding his eyes at the same time because no flesh can bear the radiance of this light. Moses saw this light in the unconsumed bush. This light, in the form of a chariot of fire, raised Elias up from the earth. Angels and serving spirits partake of the light of this fire. . . . This fire banishes demons and eradicates sins. This light is the power of the resurrection, the truth of eternal life, the dawning of the souls of saints, the continuity of the heavenly power" (St. Macarius of Egypt).

This, then, is the "Divine Energies," "the rays of Divinity" of which St. Dionysius the Areopagite speaks, the creative powers which penetrate the universe and are apprehended outside the created world as the inaccessible light, the abode of the Holy Trinity. These Energies, bestowed upon Christians through the Holy Spirit, are no longer external phenomena, but grace and inner light, which transform man's nature, deifying it. "God is called the Light, not after His nature, but in accordance with His Energy," says St. Gregory Palamas.[2] God is the Light inasmuch as He is revealed, communicated and apprehended. If God is called the Light it is only by analogy with the material light. The Divine Light has not only an allegorical and abstract meaning: it is the fact of mystical experience. This divine experience is granted to every man according to his strength and to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the worth of the man experiencing it. Perception of Divinity enveloped in the radiance of Uncreated Light is the "mystery of the eighth day," and it belongs to the future age. However, those who are accounted worthy may see *the Kingdom of God come with power* (Mark 9:1) already in this life, as the three Apostles saw it on Mt. Tabor.[3]

In the writings of St. Simeon the New Theologian we find an inspired description of the most exalted states of divine contemplation. He says: "God does not appear in some kind of an outline or fixed image, but as a simple yet incomprehensible and inexpressible formation of light, without an image. More than this I am unable to say. He appears clearly, though, and is well recognizable. He is perceived, although *purely invisibly*; He speaks and hears invisibly. God talks naturally with those who are born by Him as *gods through grace*, as men talk with one another, face to face; He loves His sons as their Father and is loved by them to the utmost; they see Him as a wondrous vision and they hear His voice in fear, but neither can they speak of this experience properly, nor can they keep silent about it. . . . They cannot have enough of the truth they hear proclaimed, because they are no longer masters over themselves, but the organs of

2. Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la Theologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient* (Paris, 1944), pp. 217-218.
3. *Ibid.*

the Holy Spirit abiding within them, Who affects them and is, in turn, affected by them. . . ."

St. Simeon addresses Divinity, saying: "Once, when Thou didst come and wash me, immersing me repeatedly in the waters, as it seemed, I saw lightning flashing around me and rays of light emanating from Thy countenance and blending with the waters; seeing myself washed in luminous, radiant waters I fell into ecstasy. . . . Some time went by, and then I saw another awesome mystery. I saw Thee ascend to heaven and take me up with Thee. However, I do not know whether Thou didst take me there in the body or without it; Thou alone knowest it, for Thou hast done it. After being there with Thee for some length of time, wondering at the greatness of glory (I do not know either whose glory it was, or what it meant), I fell into ecstasy from its infinite loftiness, and I trembled. But then Thou didst leave me again alone on the earth where I stood before. Having come to myself, I realized that I was weeping and wondering at my sorrowful impoverishment. A while later Thou didst deign to show me Thy countenance shining like the sun, without image and invisible, from on high through the open skies. . . .

"Again Thou didst appear, invisible, intangible, imperceptible . . . and Thou didst allow me to see Thy glory even more abundantly. All the while Thou wast growing larger and spreading Thy radiance more and more; and as the darkness disappeared Thou didst seem to come closer and closer, as we experience when observing sensory things. For, when the moon shines and the clouds swiftly drift by in the wind, it seems that the moon itself moves faster, although in reality it keeps its usual pace.

"Thus, O Lord, it seemed to me that Thou, being motionless, wast coming towards me; being unchangeable, wast growing larger; and having no image, didst assume an image. Sometimes a blind man who gradually grows accustomed to seeing and taking the whole image of another man, or the entire outline of a human body portrays him little by little within himself the way he is, when the likeness of a person's image is being outlined in the eyes and through them passes into the mind, being imprinted in his memory as on a tablet. So Thou too, having completely purified my mind, didst clearly appear to me in the Light of the Holy Spirit; and as my mind perceived Thee more clearly and perfectly, it seemed to me as if Thou wast stepping out of somewhere, brightly radiant, and allowing me to see the features of Thine imageless countenance. . . . When I asked Thee, saying, 'O my Lord, Who art Thou?' then, for the first time Thou didst grant me to hear Thy sweet voice, and Thou didst talk to me with such sweetness and meekness that I fell into ecstasy, trembling in amazement, thinking and speaking to myself: 'How glorious and resplendent this is!' Thou hast

told me: 'I am God become man, out of My love for thee. I am speaking to thee through the Holy Spirit, Who speaks to thee together with me. This I have given thee only because of thy desire and thy faith, and I shall give thee even more than this. . . . ' "

Under the impress of this divine contemplation, St. Simeon exclaimed in rapture: "What else could be more resplendent and exalted than this?" And he heard an answer, that the apprehension of the future life is higher than this happiness. "Thy soul is extremely small," heard St. Simeon, "if thou art satisfied with this happiness, because in comparison with the future bliss it is like a drawing of the sky on paper that someone holds in his hands in comparison with the real skies; even much more does the future glory surpass the one thou hast witnessed now."[4]

"Palamas, too, knew of an illumination of the inner man by the inexpressible light, when this light guides him along the path leading to the eternal heights and he becomes the beholder of supernatural things. . . . " According to him, an ascetic, "detaching himself from the material world through which his ascetic path takes him initially, does not ascend on the wings of the fancy of his mind, which keeps wandering about like a blind man, but proceeds towards the truth by the inexpressible power of the Spirit; spiritually and unfathomably he hears unfathomable words, he sees what is invisible, and already here on earth he is and becomes a miracle . . . he competes with the angels in incessant singing of praise to the Lord, he stands here on earth as an angel, leading all kinds of creatures through himself to God."[5]

Such are the incomprehensible spiritual experiences and lofty attainments of divine contemplation. Professor Archimandrite Cyprian explains their meaning as follows: "They demonstrate the possibility of overcoming the created world and the determinism of cosmic laws. A mystic leaves himself, the narrow framework of the created world, the laws of logical thinking, the category of time and space; he ascends to the third heaven, hears inexpressible words, is immersed in primordial abysses and is brought into contact with the transcendent foundations of creation. St. Dionysius writes that 'the soul aspires towards the incomprehensible light, unites with that which is above her, goes out of herself and becomes God's own.' "[6]

Summing up, we again quote Professor Archimandrite Cyprian: "Mystical knowledge is not only the knowledge of God and things divine, but also the

4. St. Simeon the New Theologian, *Homilies* (Moscow, 1892), Homily 90, pp. 487-489.
5. Archimandrite Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of Gregory Palamas," in *Theological Thought (Bogoslovskii Mysl')* (Paris, 1942), pp. 129-130.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

deification of one's mind; therefore mystical knowledge may apprehend God's mysteries about Himself, about the world, about man, about the beginning and the end of everything, about the things which remain out of reach for a theologian."[7] It should be also noted that mystical contemplations are not the experiences of certain subjective psychological states of joy, peace and repose; they are the revelations of another world, actual contact with this spiritual yet really existing world. It is only by the power of grace that man can attain such supernatural states. "Therefore," says St. Gregory of Sinai, "anyone who approaches contemplation without the light of grace should know that he is given to the fancies of his mind rather than contemplation, and that being in the power of fantasies he is deceiving himself."[8] And further: "Do not create fantasies yourself, and do not take in those that intrude upon you, and do not allow them to be impressed upon your mind. Because all the impressions coming from *without* and affecting our imagination serve to deceive the soul."[9] ". . . The mind itself possesses the ability to fantasize and can easily create illusory images of that which is desired. . . . Thus, a person experiencing this is a dreamer, and not a hesychast."[10]

A wonderful definition of hesychasm is given by St. Nicetas Stethatos (11th century): "Hesychasm is the state of mind unencumbered by thoughts. Stillness is freedom (from passions) and delight of the soul, the abiding of the heart in God, undisturbed and unwavering, intense contemplation, knowledge of divine mysteries, the word of wisdom coming from a pure heart, discourse with God, an unsleeping eye, mental prayer, effortless repose amid great efforts and, finally, union with God."[11]

Concluding our discussion on hesychasm, we will quote St. John of the Ladder: "Only those who have acquired divine consolation and encouragement in their efforts and divine help in the inner warfare are capable of true stillness."[12] In other words, hesychasm is not for everyone, but only for those chosen for it by God's grace. True ascetics never aspired to direct mystical contemplation. This would expose them to the danger of "deception." Exalted spiritual contemplation is not the lot of every ascetic, but only of a few giants of the spirit. "One out of thousands may attain to pure prayer, but hardly one out of ten thousand may attain to the state beyond pure prayer" (St. Isaac the Syrian).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
8. *The Philokalia (Dobrotolubie)*, Vol. V (Moscow, 1900), p. 233.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
12. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder*, Step 27:55.

In his excellent essay on the types of spiritual ascent, Fr. Paul Florensky[13] establishes an ontological differentiation of spiritual types and their hierarchy. Although every type may grow indefinitely in spiritual perfection along its "curve," the character of growth, abilities and spiritual endowment all vary. The groups of types within one "species" may surpass one another in the process of growth, both in speed and intensity; they may differ from one another infinitely, and yet one may establish a certain kinship or bond between them, and they may be compared. But the different kinds of "species" are simply beyond comparison. They are of another "dough," another substance. One "species" is characterized by the ability to soar high, being endowed with the wings of an eagle; another ascends along a gently sloping curve, and it may happen that a man does not have enough time to reach the heights of Divine contemplation, the time being limited by his life's span. The disciple of a correct spiritual school never sets contemplation as an object, but rather strives towards purification from passions. The rest depends on a person's ability to ascend spiritually, on his efforts in this direction, on a correct school and an experienced elder, if the latter can choose the shortest path for his disciple. However, seeing an ascetic's firm resolution and persistence, the Lord crowns him with the fruit of the Spirit.

Professor Archimandrite Cyprian develops the same idea: "Mysticism is, first of all, a special charisma of the Holy Spirit. Not every ascetic will be granted mystical illumination, but every mystic follows the narrow and sorrowful path of ascetic endeavor. Because of this, some less endowed ascetics have only moral purification (catharsis) as their spiritual objective, while others, with a more acute spiritual vision, look deep into the vast abyss of primordial spheres and beyond the created world; they overcome the power of the attraction of our created world and, seeing their own deified future state, they communicate with God. They have not only a theoretical awareness of the dogma of incarnation – 'the Word became flesh,' with all its consequences in the classical formula of St. Athanasius of Alexandria: 'God became Man, so that man might become god' – but they actually see this deification in their mysterious visions."[14]

13. Fr. Paul Florensky, "Concerning Types of Ascent," in *Theological Messenger (Bogoslovskii Vestnik)*, Vol. II (1906), pp. 530-568. St. Paul Florensky was canonized with the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in 1982 *(editor)*.

14. Comment: "The word 'mysticism' does not exist in the language of our Fathers; this concept is of Western origin and is best rendered by 'acquisition of the Holy Spirit, aspiration to charismatic disposition." Archimandrite Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of Gregory Palamas," p. 3.

Chapter Five

CONTEMPLATION IN THE BIBLE AND IN PAGANISM

THE WORD *CONTEMPLATIO* (*θεωρία*) is derived from the word *templum* – a place with a wide view, from where augurs made their observations. *Contemplari* means an attentive observation by one's eyes or mind. Θεωρῶ means to look, to examine, then to relfect, ponder, philosophize.[1] Human nature is endowed with the ability to contemplate and to communicate with God. The history of mankind as recorded in the most ancient book, the Bible, actually begins with the story of this ability, of man's communication with God. "The story from the Book of Genesis gives us an idea about the intimate relationship between Adam, Eve and God, which was interrupted by the Fall. When passing through Paradise God calls Adam, and Adam hides himself (Gen. 3:8). From that moment on, man can no longer bear the sight of God. However, man is drawn to the vision of which he has now become unworthy. From that time on, in the entire course of Biblical history, this tormenting conflict between man's most profound aspirations and his awareness of his own unworthiness is evident, even in the greatest friends of God. God both attracts and frightens them."[2]

Neither were the best people of the pagan world deprived of feeling for God, although there it manifested itself differently than among the Jews, who received their religion through divine revelation. This resulted also in the fact

1. *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualite*, Fasc. XIII (Paris, 1950), p. 1717.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1654.

that "the Greeks, and Plato's disciples in particular, conceived God's transcendence in a metaphysical sense: as long as man is not free of matter, he cannot have any contact with the spiritual world; he differs too greatly from it to reach it. The Bible, however, confesses man's moral iniquity: God is holy, man is sinful. To see God is not physically impossible for him, but it is forbidden: one cannot see God and remain alive."[3]

Both Jews and pagans aspired to know God, as we are told by the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and others. Their mystical experience may be called natural, as distinct from the supernatural Christian experience. The difference between them is as follows. In Christian contemplation, God Himself acts and unites with a purified soul. This is a supernatural act, an act of mutual love between the Creator and His creation. No notion of divine love is given in natural contemplation. A non-Christian soul may have only a very vague idea about God; it is as if one were to touch an object in the dark without a chance of determining it. This kind of mysticism, in comparison with Christian mysticism, is like a shadow.[4]

Mystical perception of the supernatural world contains also the possibility of contact with the powers of evil. A man who is not purified by repentance, and whose spiritual vision is not illumined by passionlessness, cannot have the "gift of discerning spirits"; and if, moreover, he has mediumistic inclinations, he can easily arrive at the state of self-deception or *prelest* (spiritual delusion). The only true path to contemplation is the path of Christian asceticism.

3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1717, 1762.

Chapter Six

PRELEST

THE MAIN DANGER in the way of ascetic endeavors lies in the possibility of *prelest*.

Bishop Ignatius writes that "men of prayer are subjected to all kinds of delusion if *repentance* does not form the foundation of their prayer, if it has not become the soul and the *aim of prayer*. Anyone trying to join the wedding feast of the Son of God without the clean and bright wedding garment[1] prepared by repentance, but simply in rags, in a state of self-delusion and sin, will be thrown out into pitch darkness – into demonic delusion."[2]

Humility always accompanies sanctity. Sanctity is unthinkable without it. Professor Archimandrite Cyprian says: "The humility with which St. Simeon the New Theologian acknowledges his imperfection, and contritely confesses his past sins and falls, serves as a guarantee that his mystical experience is completely free of the element of *prelest* and spiritual pride. Ascetic literature abounds in warnings to novices not to yield to false visions and delusions, not to take an angel of darkness for an Angel of Light. St. Simeon warns against believing in all kinds of knocking noises, voices, intimidations, visions of sensory light, fragrances, etc., which tempt the awareness of an ascetic at the time of prayer. . . . Along

1. In ancient times, a king would send a special festive garment to those who were invited to his feast. In one of the Savior's parables, the wedding garment symbolizes the grace of the Holy Spirit which God grants to a true ascetic.
2. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 135.

with humility, the mysterious bond with the Church protects mystics from falling into any false mysticism."[3]

All varieties of self-delusion or *prelest* are of two kinds. They are caused, firstly, by improper activity of the mind and, secondly, by improper activity of the heart (feeling). "The desire and aspiration to perceive spiritual visions by a mind unpurified of passions and unrenewed by the Holy Spirit is filled with pride and lack of discernment; the same pride and lack of discernment make the heart desire and aspire to delight in holy and divine experiences while still being incapable and unworthy of receiving them."[4]

The first kind of delusion, caused by the heating of the mind and imagination, frequently ends in mental derangement and suicide. The second kind is called "opinion," and it leads to such a tragic end less frequently because it deludes the mind but does not drive one to a frenzy. Nevertheless, it is just as ruinous: an ascetic who tries to awaken love for God in his heart and compels himself to experience delight and rapture while disregarding repentance, achieves just the opposite: "he enters into communion with Satan and begins to hate the Holy Spirit." "Opinion," in various degrees, is very widespread. "Anyone who does not have a contrite spirit and considers himself a person of virtue and merit, anyone who does not strictly adhere to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, but thinks freely according to his own opinion or a foreign teaching, is actually in this kind of *prelest*. The degree of deviation and the persistence in this deviation determine the degree of *prelest*. . . . "[5] In our fallen state, only one kind of feeling is admissible in the unseen worship of God: the feeling of sorrow for one's sins and sinfulness, one's fall and ruin, which is also called lamentation, repentance, contrition of spirit. . . . " *A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God,Thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 50:17).[6]

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov tells of a characteristic case of *prelest* caused by the heated mind and imagination. An Athonite monk paid him a visit and said: "Pray for me, Father, I sleep a lot and I eat a lot." As he was saying this, Bishop Ignatius felt heat exuding from the monk. In order to learn about the spiritual state of the Athonite, Bishop Ignatius asked the monk to instruct him in prayer. "Oh horrors!" This monk began teaching him a method of "ecstatic prayer, utilizing the imagination." Later it turned out that the Athonite was completely unfamiliar with the teaching of the Holy Fathers on prayer. Bishop Ignatius continues: "In the course of our conversation I said to him:

3. Archimandrite Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of Gregory Palamas," p. 113.
4. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 144.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

'Look, Elder, when staying in Petersburg, under no circumstances take lodgings in an upper story; be sure you stay on the ground floor.' 'Why so?' objected the monk. 'Well,' I answered, 'if angels should suddenly decide to take you up and transport you from Petersburg to Mt. Athos, and if they would take you from the upper floor, they could drop you down and you would die on impact; if however, they would take you from the ground floor and drop you, you would only be bruised.' 'Believe me,' answered the Athonite, 'many times when I stood praying, a vivid thought would come to me that angels would take me up and carry me to Mt. Athos.' It turned out that the Hieroschemamonk was wearing chains on his body, was hardly sleeping, was eating very little, and that he was feeling warmth in his body and had no need of warm clothes in the wintertime. Towards the end of our conversation I decided to suggest to the monk that, being an ascetic and faster, he should try the method taught by the Holy Fathers. They advise to keep the mind free of any dream-like fantasies and wholly and attentively immersed in the words of prayer, 'to enclose the thought within the words of prayer' (St. John of the Ladder, Step 28:17). The heart then usually sympathizes with the mind, feeling salutary sorrow for the sins committed, as St. Mark the Ascetic said: 'When the mind prays without distraction it afflicts the heart: *a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise*' (Ch. 34, *Philokalia*, Part I). 'After you have tried this method,' I said to the Athonite, 'let me know about the fruit of your experiment; it is inconvenient for me to undertake such an experiment, considering my distracted way of life.' The Athonite agreed. A few days later he came and said: 'What have you done to me?!' 'What happened?' 'Well, as soon as I tried to pray enclosing my mind in the words of prayer, all my visions disappeared, and I can no longer return to them.' During our further conversation, I did not detect the kind of impudence and self-reliance which I noticed in him during our first meeting and which are usually noticeable in persons given to self-deceptions and imagining themselves to be holy or spiritually successful. The monk expressed his wish to hear my humble advice. When I advised him not to differ from others externally, for this leads to haughtiness, he took off his chains and handed them to me. A month later he came again and told me that he no longer suffered from heat in his body, that he was now in need of warm clothes and that he slept more. He told me that many monks on Mt. Athos, renowned for their holiness, use the method of prayer which he had previously practiced and instructed others in that method as well."[7]

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-142.

ELDER ANATOLE (POTAPOV) THE YOUNGER OF OPTINA
standing in front of the cell of Elder Ambrose. Elder Anatole was personally known to the author, being the leading Elder of Optina at the time the author went there.

From the Kontzevitch photograph collection.

Chapter Seven

ELDERSHIP

1. WHAT IS ELDERSHIP?

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. . . . But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. (I Cor. 14:1, 3)

THE APOSTLE PAUL enumerates three ministries in the Church, independent of the church hierarchy: apostles, prophets, teachers.

Immediately after the apostles stand prophets (Eph. 4:11, I Cor. 12:28). Their ministry consists primarily of "edification, exhortation, and comfort" (I Cor. 14:3). With this aim, and also for pointing out or warning, prophets also predict future events.

Through the prophet, the will of God is immediately revealed; and therefore his authority is limitless.

The prophetic ministry is a special gift of grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit (charisma). The prophet possesses a special spiritual vision — clairvoyance. For him the boundaries of space and time are, as it were, set aside; with his spiritual gaze he sees not only events that are occurring now, but also future events. He sees their spiritual meaning; he sees the soul of man, his past and future.

Such a high calling cannot but be bound up with a high moral level, with purity of heart, with personal sanctity. Sanctity of life, indeed, was required of

the prophet from the first period of Christianity: "He must have the manner of the Lord. From his manner may be distinguished the false prophet and the (true) prophet," says one of the oldest works of Christian literature, the *Didache* (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*).[1]

The ministries enumerated by the Apostle Paul have been preserved in the Church in all ages. The ministries of apostle, prophet, and teacher, being independent, may be combined with the rank of bishop or priest.

The prophetic ministry, bound up with personal sanctity, has flourished when spiritual life in the Church was high, and has declined in decadent periods. Most brightly of all is it manifested in monastic eldership.

The influence of eldership extended far beyond the boundaries of a monastery's walls. Elders spiritually guided not only monks, but also laymen. Possessing the gift of clairvoyance, they edified, exhorted, and comforted everyone (I Cor. 14:3); they healed illnesses of soul and body, warned against dangers, indicated the path of life, revealed the will of God.

Being a direct continuation of the prophetic ministry, eldership appeared under this name and in this form only in the 4th century, together with the arising of monasticism, as its guiding principle.

2. THE MEANING OF THE COUNSELLING ACTIVITY OF ELDERS

As a ship which has a good helmsman comes safely into the harbor with God's help, so the soul which has a good shepherd, even though it has done much evil, easily ascends to heaven. (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*)

The hardships of inner ascetic struggle, which aims at acquiring purity and dispassion, reveal the great significance of the counselling activity of elders.

1. K. Popov, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Kiev, 1884). pp. 21, 36. Professor K. Popov, who wrote a special study on this document, attributes it to the end of the 1st century. Consequently, Apostle John the Theologian was still alive then, and perhaps other Apostles as well. Thanks to this document, we have found out much about the life of the Church of the First Christians. Personally, I have been searching for five years to form the concept of eldership, since in our contemporary theological literature there is no such thing. And finally I found the answer to my quest – although under a different name, not under the name of eldership – in the most ancient Christian document, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.

St. John of the Ladder says: "Those who rely on themselves and think that they have no need of any guide are deceiving themselves."[2]

"Without a guide one easily wanders from the road, however prudent one may be; and so, he who willfully walks the monastic path easily perishes, even though he may have all wisdom."[3] The same idea is expressed by St. Mark the Ascetic (4th century): "For the man who goes his monastic way willfully and without any guidance often stumbles and falls into many pits and snares of the devil; he frequently exposes himself to many dangers, not knowing what awaits him at the end. For many have endured great ascetic labors, much hardship and toil for God's sake, but because they relied on their own judgment, lacked discernment, and failed to accept help from their neighbor, their many efforts proved useless and vain."[4]

The erroneous ways of self-willed monks are caused, among other things, by the fact that the demons always try to present light as darkness and darkness as light, as the Apostle says: *For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light* (II Cor. 11:14).

The monks Ignatius and Callistus instruct: "Most importantly, in everything you do, ask to be advised by your spiritual father in Jesus Christ; for in this manner, by the grace of Christ, the unbearable and the arduous become easy, and it will seem to you that you are rapidly moving along a gently sloping field."[5] In this instruction we find five signs of a sincere spiritual attitude of spiritual children to their elder and guide: "1) complete faith in him, 2) truthfulness: being truthful before him in word and deed, 3) not following one's own will in anything, but instead trying to cut it off (*i.e.*, doing nothing according to one's own wish and understanding, but always asking for the elder's advice in everything), 4) never objecting or arguing, since arguments are caused by one's pride and unbelief, and 5) complete and sincere confession of one's sins and the secrets of the heart" (revelation of thoughts).[6]

3. THE REVELATION OF THOUGHTS

The revelation or confession of thoughts, according to Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, "was in all probability instituted by the Apostles themselves"

2. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder*, Step 1:7.
3. *Ibid.*, Step 26:237.
4. "Letter to Nicholas the Solitary," in the book of St. Mark the Ascetic (Optina edition).
5. *The Philokalia (Dobrotolubie)*, Vol. V, p. 355.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

(James 5:16) and was generally practiced in ancient monasticism, as is clearly evident in the writings of Sts. Cassian, John of the Ladder, Barsanuphius the Great, Abba Dorotheus, and, in a word, in all patristic writings on monasticism. However, an indispensable condition for practicing confession of thoughts is a monk who has been brought up in this practice and has attained a certain degree of spiritual perfection.

St. Cassian the Roman says: "It is beneficial to reveal one's thoughts to the fathers, not just to any father, but to spiritual elders esteemed not because of their venerable age and gray hair, but because of their discernment. Many men, carried away by the obviously old age of an elder, confessed their thoughts to him, but instead of being healed they suffered harm caused by the incompetence of their confessor,"[7] "for not everyone by any means can take upon himself the thoughts confessed to him" (Sts. Barsanuphius and John).[8] St. Ephraim the Syrian forewarns: "If you are not yet in a great measure inflamed by the Holy Spirit, do not aspire to hear other men's thoughts."[9] "A confessor must be burning with the fire of grace, so that this fire may scorch the wickedness of other men's thoughts and passions, and that grace and confession may not break but rather bind even more the chain of moral relations between him and the men making a confession. An elder called upon to hear confessions 'judges in accordance with the Spirit of God abiding within him.' "[10] "Father, tell me what the grace of the All-Holy Spirit will reveal to you, and heal my soul" (Palestinian Patericon)[11] — these are the words with which a repentant monk addresses the ascetic. The grace of the Holy Spirit was, namely, the power which imparted to an elder his inner authority to hear the confession of thoughts and to cure them.

This practice, according to Bishop Ignatius, "is of unusual benefit for the soul: no other single ascetic effort mortifies passions with such ease and power as this one. Passions retreat from the one who mercilessly confesses them."[12]

"Anyone concealing his thoughts is incurable" (Sts. Barsanuphius and John). "Do not hide your thoughts, confusions and suspicions. . . . It is over such a man who hides his bad or good thoughts that the demons rejoice (St. Isaiah). "Having rejected shame, we should always reveal to our elders everything that takes place in our heart" (St. John Cassian). "A wicked thought will weaken immediately after it is confessed. And even before the penance is imposed, the

7. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 545.
8. Smirnov, "Confession and Repentance in Ancient Monasteries of the East," in *Theological Messenger (Bogoslovskii Vestnik)* (April, 1905), pp. 755-763.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 545.

abominable dragon flees, as if dragged out into the daylight from his dark underground cave by the courage of confession and now displayed in his disgrace" (St. John Cassian). "Base thought is the beginning and the root of transgressions; when it is concealed it turns into an act of darkness" (St. Theodore the Studite).[13]

The revelation of thoughts is the most powerful weapon in the hands of a spiritual father and elder. The author of these lines frequently witnessed the Elder of Optina Monastery, Hieroschemamonk Anatole (Potapov) receive confessions of thoughts from the monks. This scene created a very strong impression. Filled with concentrated attention and reverence, the monks would one after another walk up to the Elder. They kneeled when receiving his blessing, and exchanged a few short phrases with him. Some passed through quickly, others lingered a few moments longer. One could feel that the Elder treated them with fatherly love and authority. Occasionally he would resort to an external mode of treatment, like gently slapping the penitent monk on the forehead, probably to fight off obtrusive thoughts. All the monks left the Elder at peace and consoled. This would take place twice a day, mornings and evenings. Truly, life in Optina was unmarred by troubles, and all the monks had a kind, even tender disposition; some were cheerful, others deeply concentrated. One has to see with one's own eyes the result of the revelation of thoughts in order to understand its meaning fully. An ancient monk described in the following words the state of holy joy experienced by a man after he confessed his thoughts: "I was full of ineffable joy, feeling my mind purified of any sinful desires. I delighted in a purity which I cannot describe. The truth itself is the witness of this; I was fortified by firm faith in God and by great love. . . . I became dispassionate and bodiless, enveloped in God's enlightenment, having been created by His will" (Palestinian Patericon, II, pp. 95-96).[14]

St. Abba Dorotheus (†620), when teaching about the fear of God, told of the blessed state he attained when revealing his thoughts to his Elder: "I was free of any sorrows, of any anxieties. If some disquieting thought occurred to me, I would write it down on a tablet (because I was used to writing down my questions before attending to the Elder); and no sooner would I finish writing than I would feel benefit and relief, so great was the carefreeness and peace in me. Not understanding the power of virtue and having heard that *we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God*, I was worried that I had no sorrows. I revealed this thought to my Elder, and he said: 'Do not grieve, you have

13. Smirnov, "Confession and Repentance in Ancient Monasteries of the East," in *Theological Messenger* (March-April, 1905), pp. 459-470.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

nothing to worry about. Whoever is in obedience to the fathers enjoys freedom from cares, and peace.' "[15]

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov says that those monks who live by the rules of St. Nilus of Sora, who submit to the guidance of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers, and are in the habit of confessing their thoughts, may be likened to men who see and live, while those who disregard such a way of life are like blind men, like corpses.[16]

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ELDER

In ascetic literature, when choosing a spiritual guide one is advised not to look for great endowments in him, for an ability to perform miracles, or a gift of prophecy, etc., but to choose one who is experienced in spiritual activity, who has personally attained purification of passions: for even a man of passions may possess spiritual gifts. . . . St. Macarius of Egypt said: "It happens that one may have grace, although his heart is not yet pure. That is why some men could not but fall: they did not believe that smoke and sin were abiding in them along with grace."[17]

Only a man who has successfully traversed the path of spiritual labor himself can lead others along this path.

An ascetic who has without a particular effort received the gift of grace because of the purity of his soul, which he has preserved since childhood, may not have the ability to guide others. Because he is not familiar with the ways of evil from his own experience, he does not know of the warfare against passions, and therefore he does not perceive evil in others. There were cases when such elders, being holy themselves, harmed their disciples and even "drove them into delusion."

In order to direct others, one needs the gift of discernment: "This art is half-way to sanctity" said the Optina Elder, Fr. Leonid. A true elder must have the gift of discernment.

Bishop Ignatius speaks of this gift as follows: "St. Cassian the Roman says that the Egyptian Fathers, among whom monasticism especially flourished and produced astonishing fruits, affirm that 'it is good to give spiritual direction and to be directed by those who are really wise,' and they state that 'this is a

15. "Instruction on Fear in Christian Reading," 1829, in the *Patrology* of Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov (St. Petersburg, 1882), no. 244.

16. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 545.

17. St. Macarius of Egypt, *Homilies*, Homily 26:25, p. 205.

very great gift and grace of the Holy Spirit.' An indispensable condition of such submission is a spirit-bearing guide who by the will of the Spirit can mortify the fallen will of the person subject to him in the Lord, and can mortify all the passions caused by the fallen will as well. Man's fall and corrupt will imply a tendency to all passions. It is obvious that the mortification of a fallen will, which is effected so sublimely and victoriously by the will of the Spirit of God, cannot be accomplished by a director's fallen will when the director himself is still enslaved to the passions. 'If you wish to renounce the world and learn the evangelical life,' said St. Simeon the New Theologian to the monks of his time, 'do not entrust yourself to an inexperienced or passionate master, lest instead of the evangelical life you learn a diabolical life. For the teaching of good teachers is good, while the teaching of bad teachers is bad. Bad seeds invariably produce bad fruits. Every blind man who undertakes to guide others is a deceiver, and those who follow him are cast into the pit of destruction according to the word of the Lord: *if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a hole* (Matt. 15:14). . . .' Those elders who take upon themselves the role of the ancient holy elders without having their spiritual gifts should know that their very intention, their very thoughts and ideas concerning the great monastic work of obedience, are false; let them know that their very outlook or way of thinking, their reason and their knowledge are self-delusion and diabolical *prelest* which cannot fail to give birth to a corresponding fruit in the person guided by them.

"If there is no good director available," continues Bishop Ignatius, "it is better for an ascetic to be without one altogether than to submit himself to an inexperienced one. . . . It is a terrible business to take upon oneself duties (of eldership) which can be carried out only by order of the Holy Spirit and by the action of the Spirit. It is a terrible thing to pretend to be a vessel of the Holy Spirit when all the while relations with Satan have not been broken, and the vessel is still being defiled by the action of Satan (*i.e.*, dispassion has not yet been achieved)! Such hypocrisy is terrible. It is disastrous both for oneself and one's neighbor; it is criminal in God's sight, blasphemous. . . . 'St. Poemen the Great ordered that a penitent should immediately break with an elder if living with him proved to be harmful to the soul' (Alphabetical Patrology). Evidently this meant that the elder in question was breaking the moral tradition of the Church. It is another matter when no harm is done to the soul, and one is only disturbed by thoughts, which are obviously diabolical. We must not yield to them. They operate just where we receive spiritual profit, which is what the demons want to snatch from us."[18]

18. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 92-96.

An elder who has gained personal experience in the school of sobriety and mental prayer of the heart, who has thus mastered spiritual-psychological laws, and who has already personally attained dispassion, becomes capable of guiding a novice in his "unseen warfare" on the way to dispassion. He must be able to penetrate the very depths of the human soul, to see the very inception of evil within it, along with the causes of this inception, to diagnose a disease and find the precise method of healing it. An elder is a skillful spiritual physician. He must clearly see the "inner make-up" of his disciple, *i.e.*, the character of his soul and the degree of his spiritual development; he must possess the gift of discrimination and "discernment of spirits," because at all times he has to be dealing with evil which tries to transform itself into an angel of light. As a man who has attained dispassion, an elder usually has other spiritual gifts as well: those of clairvoyance, of miracle-working, of prophecy. . . .

In the highest degree of proficiency, as exemplified in St. Seraphim of Sarov, an elder attains complete and unrestricted freedom to manifest his activity, for not he, but Christ lives in him (Gal. 2:20); all his activity is in the Holy Spirit, and therefore always in harmony with the Church and its institutions.

Eldership is not a hierarchical rank within the Church; it is a special kind of sanctity, and therefore it may inhere in anyone. A monk without any clerical rank could be an elder, as, for instance, was the case with Fr. Barnabas of Gethsemane Hermitage at the beginning of his activity in spiritual guidance. A bishop, too, may be an elder: for instance, Ignatius Brianchaninov, or Anthony of Voronezh, the great contemporary of St. Seraphim. There were elders among priests as well: St. John of Kronstadt and Fr. George [the New Martyr] of Chekriak village. Finally, eldership can also be taken on by a woman, as for example the clairvoyant Blessed Parasceva Ivanovna, a fool-for-Christ of the Diveyevo Convent, without whose advice nothing was ever undertaken in that monastic community. [Also, abbesses and righteous laywomen can function as eldresses.]

Thus, to sum up, eldership is a special gift of grace, a charisma exercised under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, a special kind of sanctity. While all members of the Church are bound to submit themselves to the Church authority, no one is bound to submit to the authority of an elder. An elder never imposes himself on anyone; one always submits to him voluntarily. However, having once found a true, grace-inspired elder and having surrendered to him, the disciple should unreservedly obey him in everything and his advice must be followed, because through the elder God's will is being directly revealed to him. And such "monastic obedience" — in the form that was practiced in ancient monasticism — is called by Bishop Ignatius "a lofty spiritual mystery."[19] Also

19. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 540.

to "inquire of an elder" is not required of anyone, but once one has asked for advice, one must follow it for the above reason.

If a contemporary ascetic can no longer find an experienced spiritual director, through no fault of his own but by reason of a complete absence of the latter, he nevertheless should not lose heart and leave his ascetic endeavor. According to the advice of St. Nilus of Sora, a monk of today must turn to the Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers; he must not be alone in this, but seek the "counsel of the more proficient brethren, though at the same time comparing their counsel with Scripture."[20] To encourage ascetics in their difficult situation, Bishop Ignatius refers them to the advice of St. Isaac the Syrian: "A monk should not doubt that he will receive the gift of Divine grace, just as a son does not doubt that he will receive inheritance from his father. This inheritance is his by the law of nature." The aim of monasticism is renewal by the Holy Spirit, but St. Isaac names repentance and humility as the means towards this aim, and advises monks to acquire the ability to weep over themselves and use the prayer of the publican. He suggests that we uncover in ourselves enough of sinfulness to make our conscience remind us that we are but unworthy servants and in need of mercy. "Divine mercy," says the Saint, "comes to us by itself and at the time when one is not thinking about it. Indeed it is so — but only if the ground is pure and undefiled."[21]

We should repeat here that proper ascetic endeavor is impossible without the Jesus Prayer. Speaking of those who are afraid to begin practicing the Jesus Prayer, the Elder Basil Polyanomerulsky (the teacher of St. Paisius Velichkovsky) says: "Some who are unfamiliar with this prayer from their own experience think that they have the gift of discernment, and they justify themselves, or, you might say, are disinclined to learn this holy activity for three reasons or considerations. Firstly, they dismiss it as an exclusive feature of holy and dispassionate men. The second reason given is the scarcity of experienced guides and teachers, and the third reason — the danger of delusion. However, these reasons are ungrounded: the first — because the initial stage of spiritual progress for novices consists of the weakening of passions by sobriety of the mind and watchfulness of the heart, *i.e.*, mental prayer, as it befits an active soul. The second argument is unreasonable and ungrounded because in the case of a lack of proper guides and teachers, Holy Scripture is our teacher. The third argument entails self-deception: instead

20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 163 (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies 55 and 2).

of learning about delusion and the cautions against it from Holy Scripture, these cautions themselves are misinterpreted and presented as a basis for reluctance to practice mental prayer. If you fear to practice this prayer out of reverence and simplicity of heart, know that I, too, fear it for this reason — but not because of some senseless fables, according to which 'if you fear the wolf, don't go into the forest.' One should fear God, but not run away from Him or renounce Him on account of this fear."[22]

The contemporary position of spiritual guidance (*dukhovnichestvo*), as we will soon see, goes back to ancient monastic eldership (*starchestvo*) and is its secondary form. Because of the kinship of these two phenomena (spiritual guidance and eldership) many less experienced priests, only theoretically familiar with ascetic literature, may always be tempted to "exceed their authority," to overstep the boundaries of their position as spiritual guides, in order to assume the role of an elder, while in actual fact they do not understand what true spiritual counselling by elders is all about. This circumstance is fraught with the danger of causing irrevocable harm to the souls of their spiritual wards. It is well known that there have even been cases of suicide as a result of such harm being inflicted.

In pseudo-eldership, the will of one person is enslaved by the will of another, contrary to the point made by the Apostle Paul: *Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men* (I Cor. 7:23), and this situation entails a feeling of oppression, despondency or an unhealthy partial attitude to the "elder." A true grace-filled attitude to an elder, although based on unconditional obedience, does not deprive a person of the feeling of joy and freedom in God, because he is not in submission to the will of man, but through it to the will of God. He knows from his experience that the elder shows him the best way out of any given external difficulty, or offers him the best cure of his spiritual illness.

While the grace-filled elder is the bearer of God's will, the pseudo-elder overshadows God.

One should not confuse the counselling activity of elders with monastic discipline and the authority of superiors, or with the special kind of ascetic endeavor in which a monk submits to complete external obedience to a frequently severe and passionate "elder," thus consciously embracing martyrdom, as it were. Not every monk is strong enough to go through this kind of mortification of his will, and it may cause great anguish and indifference in the spiritual life. It is not an example to be imitated, but rather an exception worthy of astonishment.

Bishop Ignatius tells novices to obey the superior and other monastic authorities, as well as to obey "all fathers and brethren in matters that do not conflict with the Law of God, or with the rule and order of the monastery, or with

22. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

the directives of the monastic authorities. But on no account obey what is evil. . . . Seek the advice of virtuous and sensible fathers and brethren, but accept their advice with extreme caution and discretion. . . do not be carried away by advice which impresses you greatly at the start," for it may appeal to you because of your inexperience or because it gratifies some hidden passion within you.[23]

The relationship of an adviser to a learner entirely differs from that of an elder to a novice, a slave in the Lord, for whom the elder assumes complete responsibility. An adviser is not responsible for his advice if he has given it with the fear of God and with humility, not of his own accord but because he was asked and required to give it. And compliance with the advice received is not compulsory: it may be carried out or not carried out. "Let us not hide the word of God, but let us make it known," says St. Nilus of Sora. "The Divine Scriptures and the words of the Holy Fathers are as numerous as the sands of the sea. Diligently searching them out, we teach them to those who come to us and who are in need of them (who require them, ask for them). More correctly, it is not we who teach, because we are unworthy to do so, but it is the blessed and holy Fathers who teach from Divine Scripture." "There you have a superb model for our guidance today!" concludes Bishop Ignatius.

A certain experienced priest, speaking of spiritual guidance and pointing to the difference between the counselling activity of elders and that of spiritual guides, expressed himself as follows: "A spiritual guide directs one to the path of salvation, while an elder leads one along this path."

5. ELDERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN HISTORY

The elements of eldership (*starchestvo*) can be found already in the charismatic phenomena of early Christianity. These charismatic phenomena, says Professor Smirnov, reappeared in ancient monasticism, and the elders were the bearers of the charisma — the special gift of the Holy Spirit, received by man directly from God for his personal achievement. The right to bind and to absolve, or the "power of the keys," was interpreted then as the highest and most perfect gift.[24]

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 98-104

24. In ancient times, sacramental confession was not regarded as the only, exclusive and inevitable means for remission of sins committed after baptism. Confession and repentance were regarded as only one of many methods of purifying the soul from sins. St. John Chrysostom, for example, points out five such methods: 1) public confession, 2) weeping over sins, 3) humility, 4) charity — the queen of virtues, and 5) prayer.

Let us examine: What is this monastic practice? A spiritual father (πνευματικὸς πατήρ)[25] does not mean a priest who follows a bishop's instructions; he is an "ordinary monastic elder, an indispensable guide of monks, independently appointed at a monastery and freely chosen by the pupil. For the most part, he does not have a clerical rank." "He would take his pupils' souls upon his own soul and, step by step, he would guide their spiritual lives, and, therefore, upon receiving their confession of thoughts and deeds, he would encourage and punish them."

The customary and moral relations between the elder and his pupil – spiritual father and spiritual son – both outwardly and inwardly, soon formed a solid and harmonious system which established itself as a monastic custom. The elder (as, subsequently, the spiritual father) would hear the confession and repentance, usually going over all sins, starting with a fleeting sinful thought slightly disturbing the monastic conscience, and ending with a mortal sin. "This confession and repentance before the elder used to replace the Church confession and repentance."

The influence of the elders amongst the laity began spreading very early, probably during the first years of monasticism. Laymen would seek out the elders, bypassing their pastors.

This discipline of monastic repentance in Church must have spread for reasons of its comparative ease, its superior quality and vitality, its "strictly pastoral character due to the presence of a superior and popular eldership, unavailable in the Church confessions."

For certain canonical sins, the ancient Church would first excommunicate the guilty person and then subject him to a public confession. The elder, however, upon hearing the brother's confession, would immediately reconcile him to his conscience and impose upon him a much lighter form of penance than the church would – thus he "bound and loosed."

Gradually, in the East, the monastic discipline of confession supplanted the church confession performed by the white (non-monastic) clergy, and the elders turned into father-confessors.

How did this happen? How did the monastic discipline become transformed into a general church discipline, while confession before an elder approached sacramental confession?

This phenomenon can be traced back to the Byzantine Church at the time of Leo the Armenian (†820) during the iconoclastic controversy, when the monastic elders were officially recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople,

25. This term appeared already in the 4th century and existed until the first half of the 9th century.

Nicephorus the Confessor, along with his bishops and priests. This measure was caused by the needs of the time: Orthodoxy was in danger, and it relied on the cooperation of the most zealous defenders of the veneration of icons – mostly Studite monks. As a local measure, this paved the way towards supplanting the white clergy in the practice of confession throughout the Orthodox East and for a long time to come – and this was realized after the age of the Ecumenical Councils. In the course of the 10th to the 12th centuries, secret confession became predominant, having replaced public confession and canonical penances.

Thus, the "institution" of a spiritual father first appeared in the form of monastic eldership. The term "spiritual father" had for a long time denoted a monastic elder. Later this church custom, almost in its entirety, reappeared in the practice of spiritual father-confessors.

The monastic form turned into a customary form of the Church in general, and thus existed in the East almost unchanged throughout several centuries.[26]

When Christianity was adopted in Russia, the Greek and Bulgarian clergy brought their already-established discipline of repentance and the institution of spiritual father-confessors along with their customary features which had developed during the period of the Ecumenical Councils. This discipline existed in Russia almost untouched until the 18th century, since the ancient Russian Church authorities, being faithful to old traditions, showed hardly any innovation in this sphere.

The discipline of penance in the Slavic Churches differed somewhat from that of the Greek Church. Apparently, southern Slavs allowed the white clergy to be spiritual father-confessors, which was inadmissible in the Greek Church of that time.

It is possible that the remnants of the ancient Christian public discipline were not equally preserved everywhere.

Although Russia obtained the discipline of penance from Greece and Bulgaria, it deviated from their practice because of the great territorial expanse. A separate class of spiritual father-confessors soon ceased to exist, and every white (non-monastic) priest, upon ordination, acquired the right to hear confessions.

Another peculiarity of the Russian Church was that consequently the spiritual father-confessor became also a bearer of the priestly rank.

Now let us examine: what was this discipline? As was the custom of that time, everyone was free to choose his spiritual father-confessor, but once one had chosen him, one had no right to abandon him.

26. Smirnov, "Ancient Spiritual Guidance and Its Origin," in *Theological Messenger (Bogoslovskii Vestnik)*, 1906, Vol. II, pp. 369-382.

One was bound to obey him unconditionally, implicitly, and be loyal to him until the end of one's life. The spiritual father-confessor, on his part, assumed all the responsibility for the sins of his spiritual son and took his sins upon his own soul. Let us give an example of such taking on of sins: Having heard the confession and read the prayer over his bent-over repentant son, the spiritual father lifts him up from the earth and places his right hand on his own neck, saying, "Upon my neck are your sins, O child, and may Christ our God not punish you for them when He will come in His glory for His terrible judgment."

A spiritual father is not only the witness of his spiritual son's repentance before God, but is responsible, as it were, for his sins. The sin of a repentant son imparted to his spiritual father during confession became their common sin; they were accomplices in crime, as it were.

Being the surety of his flock, the ancient Russian spiritual father-confessor (*dukhovnik*) thus became a man's guide towards the New Jerusalem, who would open the Kingdom of God for him and lead him to God's throne, saying: "Here am I and the children which Thou hast given to me."

A spiritual father's power in guiding his spiritual children was to be unconditional and unlimited, like that of an abbot or the elder in a monastery, and the penance (*epitimia*) imposed by him had to be carried out as "the commandment of God"; and whatever he bound, he alone could absolve.[27]

27. Smirnov, *Ancient Russian Spiritual Father Confessors.*

Chapter Eight

SANCTITY

WE HAVE briefly discussed the path towards the acquisition of dispassion by means of "spiritual endeavor" – in other words, by sobriety, unceasing prayer, confession of thoughts, and obedience to an elder based on complete self-renunciation.

This "royal" path is the shortest; it leads directly to purity of heart and, consequently, to God-knowledge: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8).

Dispassion is the fullness of virtue, the state of sanctity, because according to an immutable law, an eradicated passion is replaced by its contrary virtue.

Sanctity means purity of heart, the acquisition of grace (*i.e.*, of Uncreated Energy) both divine and deifying, which, like the many-colored rays of the solar spectrum, manifests itself in a variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Sanctity is the fulfillment of hope, of faith and of love for God in His Spirit. The last gift, the gift of love, is the highest and most perfect gift, for even if a man should have the gift of prophecy, know all secrets, have all knowledge, and have faith to move mountains, but have no love, he is nothing (I Cor. 13:20). The highest knowledge of God, "gnosis," is bound up with the gift of love: *He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God* (I John 4:16). St. Basil the Great says: "I am a man, but my task is to become god." This is accomplished in sanctity.

The fulness of God's grace, in transfiguring the holy struggler, overcomes the laws of created existence and the limits of time and space. Even the universal

law of gravity loses its authority in view of the lofty concept of the unsubmissiveness of a saint to the elemental laws of this world.

The very damnation of God that has weighed heavily over man's pride since Babel – the confusion of tongues – loses its effect when, by way of the Holy Spirit, the gift of tongues is bestowed upon man.

The superabundant power of God reestablishes the original integrity of human nature when, through the remission of sins by a holy man, it heals also the bodily ills of a suffering person.

God's holy men form a visible link between our world and the Kingdom of Heaven, of God. They are truly angelic men and human angels. Ascending by degrees of perfection and becoming more and more imbued with the spiritual light of Divine grace, like red-hot iron in the fire, they become luminous like the sun when they have attained the highest state of deification through the mysteries, through contemplation of and communion with God.

Sanctity is inseparable from the Church, because the Church, being the mystical Body of Christ, is the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*. The Church is the way followed by all saints, and it is the truth in which they all abide.

There can be only one truth, since it is rooted in the one and only God. The perception of this truth – gained in the course of centuries through much suffering by way of collective endeavor – is the basic prerequisite for the acquisition of the grace abiding within the Church, Catholic and Apostolic.

And the Church, possessing the fullness of truth and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, offers them to all; but the world is unable to receive them by reason of its obduracy in sin and evil.

Mysticism is inseparable from Church dogmas. They are so closely bound that mysticism has its source in dogmas, and dogmas, in their turn, are supported by mystical experience. This is a familiar theme in theology. Vladimir N. Lossky says that "Eastern tradition never made a distinction between mysticism and theology, between personal attainment of divine mysteries and the dogmas established by the Church."

A century ago the great Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, illustrated this position to perfection: "None of the deepest mysteries of the divine economy should be regarded by us as alien, or completely transcendental: we should, in all humility, dispose our mind to contemplate divine matters." In other words, "dogmas express the revealed truth which to us appears as an unfathomable mystery, but which we must attain through a certain process. In this process, instead of assimilating the mystery according to our understanding, we should, on the contrary, abide by the profound change of our inner spirit, which would then prepare the ground needed to perceive spiritual

matters. . . ." "Outside the truth presented by the catholicity (*sobornost*) of the Church, personal experience would be deprived of any trustworthiness, any objectivity. It would be a mixture of truth and lies, of reality and illusion – it would be 'mysticism' in the bad sense of the word."[1] Professor Archimandrite Cyprian, too, rejects the possibility of a personal spiritual experience outside the Church: "Along with humility, the mysterious bond with the Church protects mystics from falling into any false mysticism. No concoction of one's own, no self-assertion or setting up of one's personal experience against that of the Church is possible. A struggling ascetic verifies everything against his intuition developed in accordance with the teaching of the Church, taking the eucharistic life as the measure. The very nature of the Church is eucharistic. . . . True theological intuition is drawn from the depth of the Eucharistic Chalice, and it shines forth from the mysterious theurgical life. Abstract armchair philosophizing about God, outside the eucharistic life and without a living personal religious experience, namely the Church experience, is fruitless and therefore useless. Any daring attempts to force one's way into the sphere of mysticism without the eucharistic communion leads to nothing but self-deception, mystification of others and sectarian falling away from the Body of the Church."[2]

There are manifold types of sanctity, for the fullness of the Church of Christ embraces all life; the arches of the Church extend over the entire cosmos. Countless are the choirs of martyrs, followed by the choirs of monastic saints. The group of the Apostles is directly adjoined to the great teachers and Fathers of the Church, their work being continued by the hierarchs.

The most arduous feat (*podvig*) of self-renunciation has been accomplished by the "blessed ones" – fools-for-Christ. Having renounced their reason and the "wisdom of this world," they have taken up the cross of madness for the sake of the "madness of the Cross" (I Cor. 1:25), and received the highest spiritual wisdom instead. Any service in any walk of life performed in the spirit of self-renunciation and for the sake of God, in prayer and sobriety, leads to dispassion, for all virtues are interconnected, and the attainment of one entails all the others.

Hagiographical volumes attest to this again and again. Thus, in ancient times we see St. Philaret the Merciful being filled with grace, although he conducted his life in a family circle and was the grandfather of an empress. Before us is the giant figure of St. Alexander Nevsky, a warrior-general, administrator and great benefactor and defender of his native land. We will not enumerate all

1. V. Lossky, *Essai sur la Theologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, pp. 6, 11.
2. Archimandrite Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of Gregory Palamas," p. 114.

the saints glorified in the world. There are many. Among them are princes, warriors, missionaries; there are youths, maidens and women who attained the state of sanctity.

The types of saints are endless and manifold. Every saint, even among those of the same type, has uniquely individual traits, for every person is unique: *And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it* (Apoc. 2:17). However, what they all have in common is a moment of complete self-renunciation and resolve to follow Christ, a struggle undertaken for His sake in accordance with the Holy Gospel: *And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me* (Matt. 10:38).

This is the only way; there is no other. Whoever strives towards high spiritual attainments but neglects the struggle (*podvig*) of self-renunciation for Christ, repentance and sobriety, he *climbeth up some other way* (John 10:1).

"The purpose of earthly life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit," said St. Seraphim of Sarov. The grace of the Holy Spirit purifies, sanctifies and transfigures human nature. Man's will alone is insufficient to effect this, but without an effort on his part grace does not accomplish man's salvation: what is necessary is the cooperation (synergy) of man's free will and divine grace. The latter begins to work from the moment the ascetic (*podvizhnik*) enters the path of repentance and correct ascetic struggle (*podvig*); and like leaven it gradually penetrates the entire human nature, purifying and transfiguring it. Christ said: *Whereunto shall I liken the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened* (Luke 13:20-21). St. Macarius of Egypt tells of such an effect of grace as follows: "Grace constantly abides, takes root and works like leaven in a man, and this abiding (of grace) within him becomes something natural, as if one with his being."[3]

Not everyone can attain spiritual heights, this "intense life of the saints." God does not demand sanctity from all, but He desires salvation for all. God's infinite love calls everyone to partake of the feast of His glory. The most modest worker who received only one talent and walked the path of his life in repentance and humility is welcomed *into his Father's arms*. It is never too late to enter the path of repentance: "If any has tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him also not be alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, Who is jealous of His honor, will accept the last even as the first; He giveth rest unto him who cometh at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who hath wrought from the first hour. And He showeth mercy upon the last, and careth for the first; and to the one He giveth,

3. St. Macarius of Egypt, *Homilies*, p. 69.

and upon the other He bestoweth gifts. And He both accepteth the deeds, and welcometh the intentions, and honoreth the acts, and praiseth the offering."[4]

"Salvation is effected between fear and hope" (St. Peter Damascene). Regardless of the heights attained by a holy man, he may always fall, but there should never be a place for despair.

"Even if you do not see anything good in yourself," said Elder Macarius of Optina, "or if you are a captive of sin, this should humble you rather than confuse you, because the state of confusion makes the feeling of contrition impossible. No sin can claim victory over God's mercy; repent, and He will accept your repentance, as He did that of a fornicator and a harlot." If you cannot repent, but commit sin because you are accustomed to it, and against your will, as it were, have the humility of the publican, and this should "suffice for your salvation." For a repentant sinner who does not give way to despair considers himself the worst of all creation and does not dare to judge or reproach anyone, but is in awe before God's love for humankind, is grateful to God and "may have other good things." Should someone obey the devil by committing a sin, but out of the fear of God disobey the enemy when tempted by him to despair, there is "the hand of God in this" (St. Peter Damascene). "And let no man allow his soul to be conquered (by deviating into despair), as long as he breathes, even if his boat should suffer battering daily." Herein lies God-given wisdom; and he is "a wise sick man" who does not cut off his hope (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 7). But what one should fear is to remain in sinful negligence in the hope of future repentance, because such an attitude is the same as despair.[5]

Of the five synonyms denoting "sanctity," the word ἅγιος was the most rarely used among the ancient Greeks, inasmuch as it was inaccessible to them.

In the Bible, however, both in the New and the Old Testaments, it is almost the only word which expresses the concept of sanctity "characteristic of the religion of the true Revelation exclusively, *i.e.*, the concept in which the main principles and basic purpose of Divine Revelation are concentrated."[6]

In Christianity, the word "sanctity" is filled with a completely new, uniquely Christian content.

The pagan concept of sanctity denotes the outward relationship of a person or object to Divinity: dedication or belonging to it. The essential constituent,

4. *The Pentecostarion*: Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom.
5. *Letters of Hieroschemamonk Macarius of Optina to Laity* (Moscow, 1862), pp. 17-21.
6. Zarin, *Asceticism*, Vol. I, Book 2, pp. 17-21.

i.e., the chief moment, of the Christian concept is completely absent. The reason for this is that before the outset of Christianity, Divinity was not known as "love," which alone could call forth a real inner relationship between God and man, cause the inner transfiguration of man's nature and give his life a truly moral character.

In the pagan concept, the sanctity of Divinity was thought of as God's separation, His detachment from the world, His exalted position above everything, His infinity and incomparability to anything created. It was thought that God, being "holy," does not tolerate violation of the moral law. He punishes man for his conscious and unconscious crimes and vices, but He also does not tolerate man's outstanding moral perfection, which He regards as a desire to be His equal, as an infringement upon the divine prerogatives. Thus, an element of vindictiveness, of self-love, enters the divine life, essentially destroying the concept of sanctity.

According to the teaching of the Bible, however, man's "sanctity" consists of *his becoming like God*: the reflection and realization of divine perfection within man. Being the only bearer of the true and all-perfect, absolute life, God is also the one and only source of "sanctity." Hence, human beings may only be "participants" of His "sanctity," and this only by becoming partakers of His Divine nature. "For mankind which had sinned, such sanctifying communion with God became possible only in Christ, through the power of His redeeming sacrifice. This sacrifice was the precise and perfect fulfillment of God's will for the salvation of man, that he *should be holy and without blame before Him in love* (Ephes. 1:4)." With this purpose the entire Divine Revelation concerning the salvation of man is imbued.

The character of divine sanctity was such that it excluded the possibility of God's communion with sinful peoples. This is why one particular people was chosen from among all the nations of mankind to form a "holy" people, "for the purpose of making possible genuine union between God and man, which would be of significance for all of mankind."

Therefore, special demands of sanctity were made of the chosen people. The whole people had to be "holy" in conduct, because holy was the Lord, Who had chosen His people for a special destiny and Who had become closely bound to them in the communion of love.[7]

7. *Ibid.*

PART II

ANCIENT EASTERN MONASTICISM

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24).

A monk is an angel, and his work is mercy, peace and the sacrifice of praise
(St. Nilus of Rossano, †1005).

ST. ONUPHRIUS THE GREAT
(See p. 169).

The main icon of him in the St. Onuphrius Monastery in Poland.

Introduction

The Hierarchical Nature of the Spiritual World and the Place of Monasticism in It

CHRISTIANITY WAS BORN amidst persecutions and sufferings. At any moment a believer had to be prepared for martyrdom. This put the greatest strain on his spiritual energy and renunciation of the world. Christ's commandment, *Let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me* (Matt. 16:24), was fulfilled literally. Such a state of dispassion and sanctity was the lot of the elite, a few chosen ones.

Three centuries of persecution ended with the glorious triumph of Christianity over paganism. This heroic period was replaced by "the period of well-being and peaceful life." Religion became the property of the masses, and at the same time the high standard of early Christianity began to decline inevitably and fatally.

The new era required new methods of "attaining heavenly crowns."

In order to renounce the world, one now had to leave it; in order to attain dispassion, one had to follow the long path of "inward activity." Forced martyrdom was now replaced by voluntary mortification: self-denial and asceticism, the life of labor and deprivations in the desert.

The great exodus into the desert was about to begin; the era of monasticism was born. It was not in vain that monasticism became known as the "angel-

ic way." "Angels are the light of monks, and monastic life is the light of all men." These brief words of St. John of the Ladder (†605) contain the idea expounded by St. Dionysius the Areopagite of the unity and hierarchical nature of both the visible and invisible worlds.[1]

The teaching about angels as secondary lights is generally widespread in all the Eastern patristic writings. Professor Archimandrite Cyprian tells us of the essence of this teaching:

The Holy Trinity is the Essential, Eternal and Uncreated Light. The essence of Divinity is unfathomable, but God, in His love for the world and man, incessantly pours out His Divine Light upon the created world. It is only in this outpouring of light, in this Divine Energy, the intelligent, uncreated and eternal Light of Mt. Tabor, that God may be perceived by angels and men. St. Dionysius the Areopagite calls it "God's appearance." St. Gregory Palamas approves of St. John Damascene's term "God's aspiration." This process of divine life in the universe proceeds gradually and within the framework of a strict hierarchy. The first to partake of this Essential Divine Light are the highest ranks of angels, and they pass it on in the hierarchical order of descendancy to the lower ranks of angels. They are like mirrors reflecting this Light. They are the "secondary lights."

After the angels, the most spiritually sensitive and gifted human beings are honored by the outpouring of light. Thus is formed the "golden chain" which, according to St. Simeon the New Theologian, "is firmly established in God and is unbreakable." St. Maximus the Confessor says that "created beings partake of the divine bliss according to their capacity," and in greater or lesser degree, depending on their merit. Thus, the world of angels is an intermediary between God and man.

On earth it is the monks who continue the "golden chain," linking man to the celestial world of angels, and spreading the light of sanctity, love and wisdom upon the earthly, corruptible, and fallen world. Monks must be imbued with this light and refract it in purity, mercy and the knowledge of God; they must continue and complete the task of the angels here on earth and become the "attending spirits" for those who are to inherit salvation, for humanity that languishes in sins and unbelief.

Monks may become like angels only in their spirit, not in their body: only in that "divine spark" within themselves, or, according to St. Gregory the Theologian, in their hypostatic principle. Their task, like that of any intelligent, spiritually endowed man, is to reveal the "potentially divine element" within

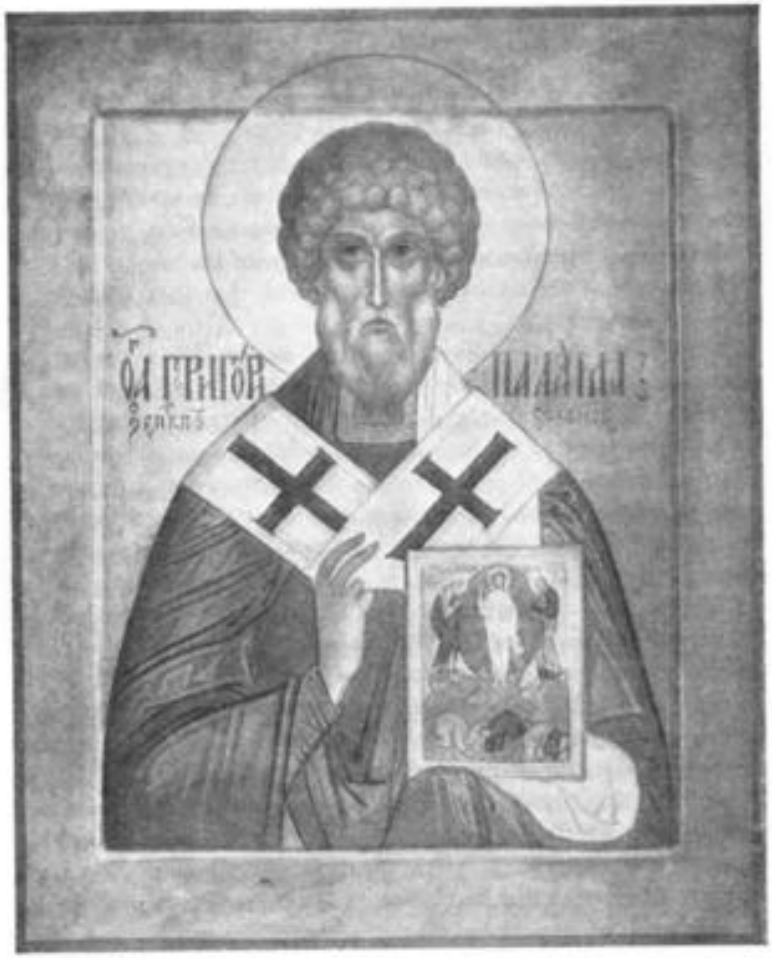
1. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder*, Step 26:31, p. 181.

themselves, to develop their spiritual endowment, to perfect themselves and approach the Divine Primary Source of life.

They can serve the world either by means of direct contact with it or by being desert-dwellers, anchorites. Being removed from the world geographically, the latter become even more closely bound to it metaphysically and spiritually through their prayer. Hermits leave the worldly life for the sake of the life of the world, for devotional service to the whole world, that they might protect it spiritually.

The motives of monasticism are not and have no right to be selfish. This would mean breaking the "golden chain," violating the universal unity of all members of the body of Christ, and falling away from the general plan of Divine Providence with regard to the world and man. Also, asceticism may not be regarded as an end in itself – it is only a means, moreover a negative means, manifested in abstinence and disregard of the lowly psycho-physical needs of man. The monastic vows of non-acquisitiveness and virginity are of the same negative nature. The purpose of monasticism, as a moral power, is not only to attain salvation for the monastics themselves, but also to save the whole world, and to attain the sanctification of creation. This is not only being saved *from* the world, but precisely saving the world. Therefore, without being repulsed by its sicknesses and without having an aversion to its uncleanness, monasticism serves the world: it protects it, prays it out of trouble, nourishes it, cleanses it through confession, and intercedes for it. To this aim was directed the service of a multitude of Holy Fathers, both those dwelling in the deserts and those revealing themselves to the world. Whether they raised themselves upon a pillar (as Sts. Simeon, Alypius, Nicetas and Daniel the Stylites) or placed themselves upon a rock (as St. Seraphim of Sarov), or fled into reclusion in deserted caves or forest sketes – all these were cases of intercession for the world. However, these ascetic endeavors and prayerful intercessions before the throne of the Lord were modified whenever the ascetics left their seclusion to serve their fellow men. It was usually the spiritually mature ascetics who would devote themselves to the task of ministering with compassionate love to their fellow men, addressing them with healing prayer and counsel. With the red-hot coal of God's Name, they touched the sores of the soul. They are the "merciful hearts"[2] of which St. Isaac the Syrian speaks in profoundly moving words, the hearts trembling with grief and compassion for every soul, for every creature, even for the enemies of the truth, *i.e.*, the demons. The line of these holy men goes back to ancient times, and extends to St. Paisius Velichkovsky and our own famous Elders of Optina. "Optina was one of the

2. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetic Homilies* (Moscow, 1858), p. 299.



ST. GREGORY PALAMAS
holding an icon of the symbol of his teaching,
the Transfiguration of our Lord on Tabor.

A contemporary Russian icon.

most wonderful flowers of the monastic garden, one of the brightest lights of the Orthodox world and of its angel-like choirs of monastics. Confession, guidance and counsel of even the seemingly most prosaic nature drew the monks ever closer to their objective – to be the guardian angels of the world.[3]

3. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Angels, Monastics and Man* (Paris, 1942), p. 7.

Chapter One

THE HOLY FATHERS ON THE ORIGIN OF MONASTICISM

WHILE IN THE MOLTEN STATE, crystalline substances have no distinct form; their particles float freely. It is only in the process of cooling that the distinct and clear forms of the crystal are developed. Similarly in the Church, her life, dogmas, canons and institutes at first do not have any clearly expressed forms. Only subsequently do they emerge out of the spiritual essence of the Church, according to the laws of truth contained in her bosom.

Thus, while the Church is in the molten state, as it were, and is permeated with the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit, any manifestations of life within her cannot be essentially untrue, because these manifestations lie in the Holy Spirit and are moved by the Holy Spirit.

As the Church expands, she absorbs elements which are still in the initial phase of spiritual development, and which have not as yet overcome "the old man" (Adam). Due to these added new elements, deviations "to the right and to the left" become inevitable. The Church is aware of the falsity of these deviations; they compel the Church to express essential truth in order to give it shape and symbol, and place it within precise limits.

Thus the forms are crystallized, the Church becomes established and her entelechy affirmed.

This idea is confirmed in the Gospel. The Savior compares *the Kingdom of heaven . . . to a grain of mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds: but when*

it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof (Matt. 13:32).

The seed of any plant potentially contains the whole plant, and with its growth nothing new or uncharacteristic of this plant is added to it. Thus, for example, nothing but an oak tree will ever grow out of an acorn. Similarly, Christianity from its very outset contained all its components, and the history of Christianity is only the further development of these components.

Thus, both monasticism and eldership must have existed, if only in embryonic form, from the very beginning of Christianity. The desert-dwellers considered St. John the Baptist as the founder of anchoretic monasticism. St. Innocent, a disciple of St. Nilus of Sora, wrote in his will: "If God will give His blessing for the church to be built in our desert, let it be established in commemoration of the great Saint, John the Baptist, on the feast day of the third finding of his venerable head, for he is the great teacher of all desert-dwelling monks." (For this reason the main church in the Optina skete was also dedicated to this Saint).

The aim of desert-dwellers is to acquire the gift of unceasing prayer. St. Gregory Palamas (†1360) elevated the practice of unceasing prayer to inaccessible heights, pointing to the Most Holy Virgin Mary as the first one to embrace unceasing prayer. He writes that the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos, while staying in the Holy of Holies and heeding Scripture, was filled with pity for fallen humanity and began Her quest for the best way to converse with God, to gain permission to intercede for humanity and ask for God's mercy. Looking for that which was most necessary, for prayer, and seeking that which awakens prayer, the Most Holy Virgin found the answer in the sacredness of stillness: stillness of the mind, remoteness from the world, oblivion to everything earthly, and ascent to divine contemplation. Abiding in stillness, the inner man is freed of all earthly, lowly, human concerns. He becomes estranged from the world and ascends to God. Remaining in prayerful devotion day and night in all stillness, man purifies his heart, becomes inexpressibly united with God, and sees God within himself as in a mirror.

Therefore the Most Holy Virgin Mary renounced all worldly concerns, rejected all communication with people and love for earthly pursuits, and chose a life invisible to all, remaining within the walls of the church. There she recollected her mind in an uninterrupted watchful abiding in God, and with the help of unceasing prayer rose above all worldly confusion and thoughts. Thus she walked a new ineffable path to heaven, which is the stillness of the mind. Rising above all created life, the Most Holy Virgin was able to contemplate God's glory much more clearly than was Moses. Having partaken of the divine grace beyond description and comprehension, she became the "bright cloud of living waters, the dawn of the conscious day, the fiery chariot of the Word."[1]

The solitary way of life of an anchorite is in contrast to another kind of monastic life, that of a coenobium (communal-type monastery).

According to St. John Cassian the Roman, an ancient writer of the end of the 4th century, the early Christian community was the prototype of the coenobium. **St. John Cassian** (†435), the son of rich and noble parents, received an excellent scholarly education. When still a young man, he went to Palestine and became a monk in a coenobitic monastery in Bethlehem. Having spent two years there, together with his friend Germanus, around the year 390 he decided to visit monasteries in Egypt, which were famous for their great ascetics. "Visiting all the renowned monasteries in Lower and Upper Egypt, like bees they gathered the best of what they observed in the monastery rules and in the lives of austere ascetics, and entered into discussions on various spiritual matters with the more enlightened and experienced elders."[2] Thus, St. John Cassian the Roman preserved for posterity his observations of monastic life in the early years of its development. These observations are of great value to us, because they reflect the life and views of the monks of that time. St. Cassian the Roman says that "this coenobitic type of life goes back to Apostolic times, since the majority of believers in Jerusalem adhered to it." In the Acts of the Apostles we read: *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands and houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need* (Acts 4:32, 34, 35). — "such, I say, was the Church then," and such a way of life now is "very rare and hardly to be found even in coenobitic monasteries." "After the Apostles died, believers became less fervent, especially those from among foreigners and other nations, by reason of their old ingrained pagan customs." It was charitably demanded by the Apostles that they *abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication* (Acts 15:29). When, however, the number of believers greatly increased because of the daily addition of new converts from "both the indigenous population and foreigners," this tolerance shown towards the former gradually began to weaken

1. Schemamonk Metrophanes, *The Life and Writings of the Moldavian Elder Paisius Velichkovsky* (Moscow, 1947), pp. 207-211. [English translation under the title *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (Platina, California: St. Herman Brotherhood, 1976).]
2. *The Philokalia (Dobrotolubie)*, Vol. I.

ST. JOHN CASSIAN THE ROMAN

A contemporary iconographic sketch by Gleb Podmoshensky

the piety of the church of Jerusalem and to diminish "the fervor of the initial faith." It was not only the new converts "but also representatives of the Church who deviated from the former strictness." "For there were some who thought that things permissible to (former) pagans due to their weakness, were permissible to them as well, and that they would suffer no harm by keeping their property and their wealth, provided they kept their faith and confessed Christ."

Those, however, who preserved the zeal of early times began to avoid communicating with their indolent and dissolute fellow men. They left the cities for the more remote isolated places where they could practice "on their own" what the Apostles had instructed the entire Church to observe. Gradually, in time, they separated from the general mass of believers, because they avoided marriage and refused to participate in their parents' lives and in worldly social life in general. They began to be called monks, *i.e.*, men living alone in strict solitary isolation. If they lived in a community, they were called coenobites, and their cells and places of dwelling were known as coenobiums. "Consequently, this type of monk was the oldest and the first, not only in time, but also in grace; as a type it remained intact for many years until the time of St. Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony the Great" (St. John Cassian).[3]

Thus the ancient Father St. John Cassian the Roman (4th century), and later St. Gregory Palamas (14th century), determined that monasticism originated in the days of early Christianity.[4]

3. Writings of St. John Cassian the Roman, in *The Philokalia (Dobrotolubie)*, pp. 498-500.

4. For example, St. Mark the Evangelist lived in a celibate community in Alexandria, which continued for centuries after him *(editor)*.

ST. PACHOMIUS THE GREAT
receiving the monastic Schema and Rule from an angel.

A fresco from the Great Meteora Monastery, Greece, painted by Theophanes the Cretan (1527).

Chapter Two

A Brief Historical Survey of Ancient Eastern Monasticism

It was from the beginning of the 4th century that monasticism began to develop. There were instances of individual hermits leaving cities even before that time, as, for instance, under Emperor Decius (249-251), when they hid from their persecutors in deserts, caves and underground pits. But these instances were exceptions rather than the common practice. Although many believers led an isolated kind of life in the cities, "monks did not yet know of the Great Desert," as St. Athanasius the Great stated.

The longing for the monastic life, the resettlement into the desert, began during the reign of St. Constantine the Great. At first it took place in Egypt, where two forms of monastic life coexisted from the start: that of the hermits and that of the coenobites. The first guide of ancient monasticism was **St. Anthony the Great** (born 251). For a long time he lived the life of a hermit in austere seclusion in the desert, close to the banks of the Nile. His followers began seeking him out, desiring to be instructed by him. He kept refusing, but finally gave in to their request and permitted them to settle in the neighborhood and build "monasteries," *i.e.*, single cells similar to the tents of nomadic tribes. These, then, were the first colonies of hermits. They lived separately, as far as possible avoiding communication among themselves, in complete seclusion; nevertheless they formed a "brotherhood" united through spiritual guidance.

Similar settlements arose in the Nitrian desert around **Abba Amoun** (died between 340 and 345), and in their vicinity were established other settlements

known as "kellia" (cells). Still further away in the desert were established "sketes" (in Coptic *sheet* – great valley). The "kelliotes" lived separately in concealed cells. These are the same as recluses. "A man who has learned of the sweetness of a cell avoids his neighbor" (St. Theodore of Pherme). "Until a man say in his heart: I alone and God exist in the world – he will find no repose" (Abba Alonius). This solitary way of ascetic endeavor is arduous, and for many even dangerous. Very early there came into existence another type of monastic settlement, where monks lived as a community: the coenobium.

The first coenobium was established by **St. Pachomius the Great** (born 292), who began his ascetic struggle as a hermit. He realized that the solitary way of life was too difficult for novices and did not benefit them. One had to be gradually brought up and prepared to embrace the creative freedom of anchorites (hermits). St. Pachomius organized in Tabenna a communal life on the principles of strict obedience. The whole life in their monastery was to be based on faithful observance of set rules, even in the smallest matters, with the cutting off of one's will (self-will). Instead of the creative improvisation of solitaries, here the monks were to realize the idea of a well-measured life protected by a severe discipline of supervision and penalties. Anchorites were usually milder and more condescending towards their weak brothers and sinners. St. Pachomius' monastery was an educational institution; even those ignorant in matters of faith were admitted. The purity and steadfastness of the candidates' intentions were subjected to a severe trial. One of the elder brethren would be appointed to guide a beginner. Monks lived in separate houses, about forty of them, supervised by a director. They would all come together for prayer. Handicrafts were assigned according to strict instructions. No one was allowed to do less or more, or wilfully to change them. It was a shared life, shared work, carried out with mutual concern, with no secrets harbored. Tradition has it that the Lord's Angel who gave St. Pachomius his monastery's Rule said: "The Rule is for those whose mind is not yet mature, so that remembering the Rule of common life, in fear before the Lord, they might attain freedom of spirit, be they even unruly slaves." Both coenobites and anchorites have a common ideal – "freedom of spirit" – but the path to it is now different [with coenobitism].

St. Pachomius himself founded nine coenobitic monasteries. Their common abbot lived in Tabenna, and later in Pevou. In St. Pachomius' lifetime, communal monasteries were springing up throughout Egypt. His sister organized a coenobitic monastery for women. In the vicinity of Atripa the hermit Bgul founded the "White Monastery," the long-time Abbot of which was the fierce and severe Shenouda. Its Rule was very strict and included corporal punishment. Characteristically, those who passed the test of community living acquired the

right to live in seclusion; however, it was demanded of them that they assemble four times a year in their original monastery.[1]

One of the successors of St. Pachomius the Great was **St. Theodore the Sanctified** (291-348). Whereas St. Pachomius tried to motivate the brothers to repent by portraying the terrible lot of sinners, St. Theodore would try to awaken hope rather than fear. History has preserved for us a vivid description of the brothers' revelation of thoughts before St. Theodore:

"There were six hundred brothers assembled. . . . An amazing order prevailed in such a numerous gathering of monks. One after another the brothers would rise and walk up to Theodore, asking him to reveal their shortcomings before all those present. Theodore would quote from Holy Scripture a passage relevant to the state of each individual brother. They would then return to their places with contrite hearts and in tears. It was not only by his experience and knowledge of his monks' inner states that Theodore was able to find suitable words from Scripture for each one of them, but rather by a supernatural knowledge which God revealed to him about their souls. His experience of this spiritual clairvoyance would manifest itself in his prophecies concerning the future destiny of the Church. Thus, a certain monk walked up to him, as had other brothers before him, when suddenly they noticed that Theodore fell silent, gazed up to the sky, then rose from his seat. All the brothers rose, too, and formed a circle around their Elder, realizing that he was about to give them some important instructions."[2]

And indeed, St. Theodore foretold to them events which soon came to pass. Namely, he told them about the exile of St. Athanasius the Great, about the dominations of the Arians, the enthronement of Julian [the Apostate], then Julian's death and the enthronement of Jovian, who brought peace to the Church. These prophecies concluded the session of the "revelation of thoughts" – the scene of which was described by its witness, St. Amoun.

"This Amoun has made the mountain of Nitria famous." There lived also **St. Pambo**, about whom St. Anthony said that the Spirit of God dwelt in his heart. According to St. Pambo, obedience to an elder is superior to non-acquisitiveness and great love, because these latter virtues are acquired voluntarily, whereas a monk under obedience renounces his own will and fulfills the will of another man. Renunciation of one's will is the highest sacrifice of man, surpassing all other sacrifices.

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1. Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the 5th to 8th Centuries* (Paris, 1933), pp. 140-143.
2. Professor P. Kazansky, *History of Orthodox Monasticism in the East* (Moscow, 1854), pp. 205-206.

In the desert of the cells, **St. Macarius of Alexandria** (295-395) and **St. Macarius of Egypt** (born 300), called the Great, were well known. Generations of ascetics of all ages were brought up on the writings of St. Macarius the Great and his school. He was once asked: "Tell us, what degree of spiritual perfection have you reached?" He replied. "Now after the sign of the cross, grace imbues the entire body and heart with peace. The soul is full of great joy, like an infant who knows of no evil, and the man no longer judges another man, be he a Greek or a Jew, a sinner or layman. He looks upon all of them with the pure eye of his inner being; he rejoices over the whole world and wishes to respect and to love both the Greeks and the Jews. At another time he, the King's son, firmly places his trust in the Son of God, as his father. Doors open before him, and as he enters, numerous doors open before him again – a hundred mansions leading to a hundred beyond. And the richer he becomes, the more new wonders are shown to him. He, being the son and heir, is entrusted with things which no human being is able to express or utter with his tongue. Glory be to God. Amen."[3]

"It should be noted," says Professor Archimandrite Cyprian, "that from his mystical experience St. Macarius knew what path all Eastern mysticism would subsequently take. St. Macarius was one of the first hesychasts. His instructions on the struggle with passions, on purification of the heart, on freeing the mind, *i.e.*, on its sobriety, all pursue the main objective: man's illumination. The mystical teaching of light, which is attained by quieting the mind from everything that may disturb and exasperate it, was well known to this desert-dweller of the 4th century, one thousand years before St. Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts came out with their teaching on the subject. Their very term 'hesychia' (stillness) was frequently used by him in association with the concepts of 'peace,' 'calming down,' 'prayer,' 'silence,' etc. Hesychasm was in no way an 'innovation' or 'invention.' St. Gregory of Sinai gave an even clearer and more precise definition of what the ascetics of the 4th century knew from experience."[4]

Elder Macarius of Optina also spoke of spiritual labor, or inward prayer, as an ancient practice. Not all the ascetics were familiar with both the concept of inward prayer and its outward, bodily methods. Thus, at the time when the Sinai ascetics practiced it, the Athonite monks observed only "active piety." The Holy Fathers of the first centuries, even if they spoke about the form of inward prayer, did so rather vaguely, in order not to cause harm to unbelievers or brazen

3. St. Macarius of Egypt, *Homilies*, p. 71. St. Seraphim of Sarov was totally imbued with the teaching of St. Macarius. In his conversation with Motovilov he expounded on the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins in accordance with the interpretation of St. Macarius, who had explained this parable twice in his writings.

4. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 223.

men who follow their self-will. Thus, St. John of the Ladder wrote (Step 27): "Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of stillness." And St. Simeon the New Theologian spoke of St. Anthony the Great: "What would he have done when dwelling in the dark pagan tomb, if he were not familiar with the form of inward prayer?"[5]

Towards the end of the 4th century, Egypt was covered with monasteries. From there monasteries moved into Palestine. Already in the 20's of the 4th century, the first anchoretic monastery was established near Gaza, around the cell of **St. Hilarion**, a disciple of St. Anthony the Great, and nearby was established the monastery of Epiphanius, who subsequently became the Bishop of Cyprus. Later were established "lavras" (λαύρα – a narrow passage, street), or large coenobiums. The first lavra, Faran, was of **St. Chariton** near Jerusalem; and then other lavras sprang up along the way from Jerusalem to Jericho, and around Bethlehem. **St. Euthymius** organized his monastery in the 5th century, and in the 6th century **St. Sabbas the Sanctified** founded his monastery with a lenient coenobitic rule, where life in a community was regarded as a preliminary step towards the anchoretic life.

The principle of communal life was described in the 4th century by **St. Basil the Great**. His coenobitic rule was of great influence throughout the history of monasticism, not only in Byzantium but in the West as well.

Monasticism in Syria developed independently of its Egyptian counterpart. Many monasteries were founded there around big cities. Characteristically, the Syrian monks were known to have practiced self-mortification. There were ascetics in the 6th century who were called "grazers" (βόσνοι), and later there were stylites.[6]

Among Syrian ascetics were two great figures who shone forth: **St. Ephraim the Syrian** (4th century) and **St. Isaac the Syrian** (7th century). St. Ephraim was a prophet and a scholarly writer, and he was endowed with an outstanding lyrical talent. Everyone is familiar with his prayer: "Lord and Master of my life. . . ." St. Isaac the Syrian refused to become a bishop and spent all his

5. *Letters of Hieroschemamonk Macarius of Optina to Laity*, p. 675.

6. A certain ascetic in the deep desert saw, from a high rock, green grass below; and he saw a man grazing on the grass like an animal. The ascetic approached him, stealthily and caught the man. He was old and completely naked. Unable to stand the smell of man, he broke loose and quickly ran off. The brother chased after him, shouting: "It is for the sake of God that I am after you, wait for me." The Elder replied: "And I am running away from you for the sake of the same God." Then he advised the brother: "Run away from men and you will attain salvation." Here is an example of self-renunciation, brought to the extreme. *Ancient Patericon*, XX, II, p. 455.

See Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the 5th to 8th Centuries*, p. 143.

ST. SABBAS THE SANCTIFIED

A contemporary icon depicting Saints associated with St. Sabbas' Monastery.

life as an anchorite, dedicating it to a solitary study of his soul. No one's instructions are imbued with a more profound psychological content than are his homilies. Having ascended through the degrees of the spiritual contemplative life himself, St. Isaac based his instructions concerning lofty contemplation on his own profound experience.

The Moslem invasion in the 7th century delivered a blow to monasticism. The Arabs conquered Syria in 636, Palestine in 637 and Egypt in 640. Monasticism could not flourish during Moslem rule in these lands. Abiza, the ruler of Egypt, issued a decree prohibiting people from becoming monastics. In 715 he repeated the decree, and monks were subjected to torture. When three Patriarchates — those of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria — were cut off from the Byzantine Church during the Moslem rule, the entire monastic life concentrated mainly in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Byzantium at that time was covered with monasteries; it was like a monastic kingdom. There were monasteries for men, for women, and mixed monasteries.[7] As to their way of life, there were coenobitic and idiorhythmic monasteries. Many monks were desert-dwellers (anchorites, hermits) and they lived in individual cells and sketes attached to lavras. They followed the Rules established by Sts. Pachomius and Basil the Great; these Rules formed the basis of the Rules of Sts. Sabbas the Sanctified, Athanasius of Mount Athos, Theodore the Studite, and others.

Byzantine monasticism victoriously carried Orthodoxy on its shoulders during the iconoclastic war which arose during the reign of Leo the Isaurian (717-741), who wanted to reform the Church in the interests of the state and to subject the Church to the state completely.

In the 9th century, monastic eldership was officially recognized by the Church and also acquired external influence and significance.

This happened due to the steadfastness and firmness of the monks during their persecution. In connection with these events, the name of **St. Theodore the Studite** (†826), came into the light. From 798 he was the Abbot of the monastery of Studium, founded in the 5th century by the Roman nobleman Studios. St. Theodore took up the defense of icons, and suffered torture and imprisonment until the end of the iconoclastic persecution. St. Theodore compiled the famous Studite Rule, which was adopted in Russia when the Kiev Monastery of the Caves was founded. St. Theodore is well known as a Church writer and compiler of Church hymns.

The focal point of monasticism at the end of the 10th century was **St. Simeon the New Theologian** (†1032). His theology formed the basis for the de-

7. "Mixed monasteries" were commonly for elderly people on pensions, and were based on an idiorhythmic principle *(editor)*.

velopment of the hesychast teaching. In his youth he was brought up near the imperial court; later he joined the Studite Monastery, where he was under the guidance of Elder Simeon the Reverent, and observed strict rules of fasting. From there he moved to St. Mamas' Monastery. During his ordination to the priesthood, the light of the Spirit of God visibly descended upon him. Later he became an abbot. St. Simeon was an inspired writer, concentrating on the topics of prayer and contemplation. He became one of the few saints upon whom the Church bestowed the designation of Theologian.

In the history of Mt. Athos, chronologically the anchoretic type of monasticism appeared first, then coenobitic life. The latter, however, is regarded as a type of life suited for beginners, and preliminary to the anchoretic life.

The first known recluse and hesychastic ascetic of Mt. Athos was **St. Peter the Athonite** (†734); and up to the 9th century only this type of monasticism (anchoretic) existed on Mt. Athos.

In the 10th century, however, due to the decline of the anchoretic life, **St. Athanasius the Athonite** (born 930) established a coenobitic lavra on Mt. Athos. Thus began the struggle between the two views on asceticism. This struggle continued for a few centuries and, as a result, it weakened the spiritual activity of the monks. This weakening, however, was caused not so much by the internal disagreement as by external blows and ravages of Mt. Athos. In 1204 Mt. Athos was seized by the Latins (the 4th crusade). Pope Innocent III annexed the entire Athos Peninsula to his personal estate, and he sent his representative there with instructions to convert everyone to Roman Catholicism. This was the beginning of a reign of cruel terrorism. The Bulgarian King John Asen II defeated the Latins near Adrianopolis, thus freeing the Holy Mountain, but not for long. In 1267 Emperor Michael Paleologus, wishing to receive assistance from the Pope in his fight against the Ottoman Turks, agreed to accept the union of Rome and Constantinople. In October of 1267, Roman Catholics and Byzantine apostates appeared on Mt. Athos and resumed persecution of the Orthodox monks. The lavra of St. Athanasius alone gave itself over for the sake of money. Other monasteries, like Zographou, Iveron and Vatopedi, remained faithful to Orthodoxy. The Zographou monks were burned, those of Vatopedi were hanged, and those of Iveron were thrown into the sea. Russian and Serbian monasteries were burned. Four hundred cart-loads of Athonite sacred objects and literary treasures were taken to the West. In 1313 Mt. Athos was delivered from the Latins. All these ravages unfavorably affected the inner life of the Athonites, but their spiritual activity was not lost permanently. When in the 14th century **St. Gregory of Sinai** (†1346) came to Mt. Athos, he addressed the ascetics "well adorned with active virtues" with the question: "Do you practice inward prayer, sobriety

ST. ATHANASIUS THE ATHONITE (THE COENOBIARCH)

A fresco in the Great Lavra, Mt. Athos.

THE MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU ON MT. ATHOS
as it looks today.

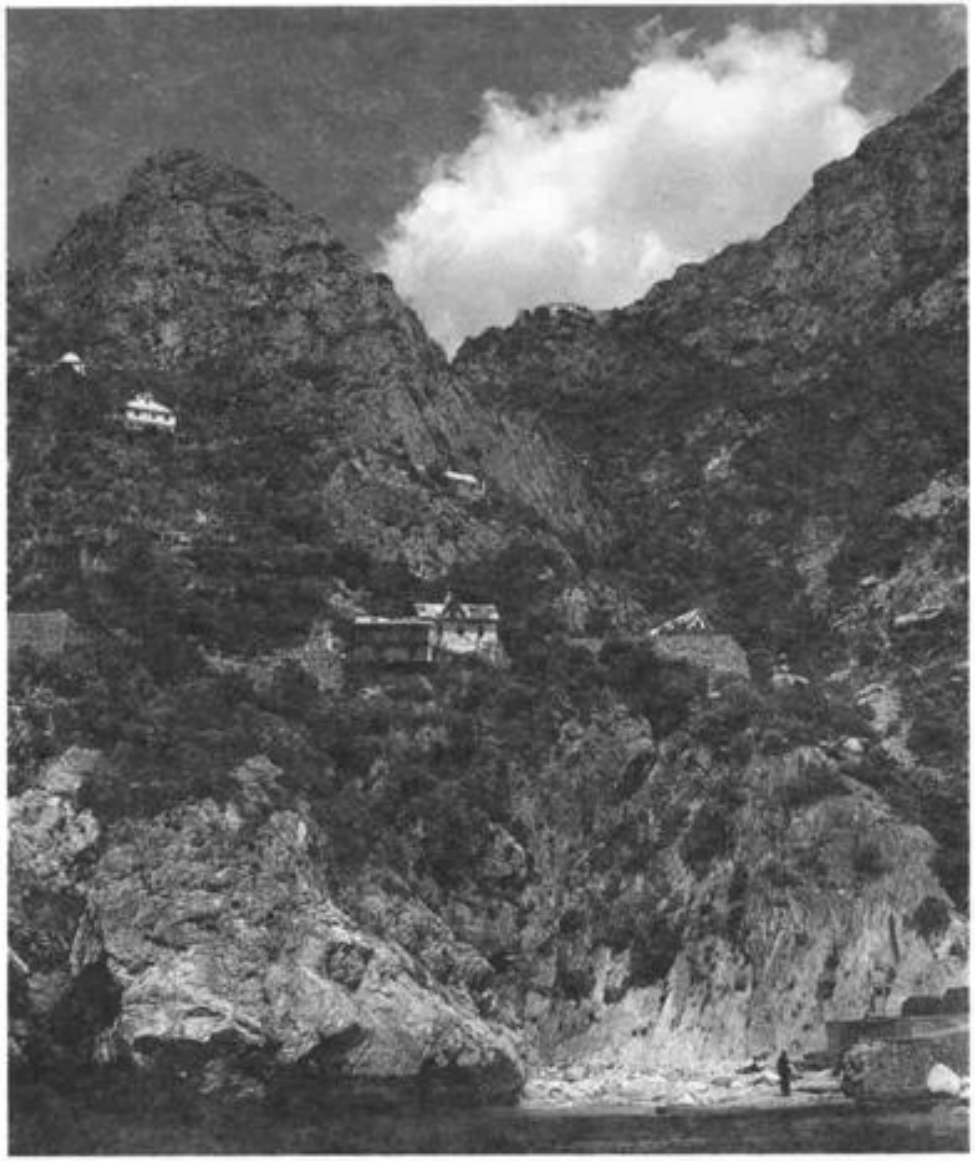
PILLARS OF MONASTICISM
Left to right: St. Athanasius the Athonite, St. Simeon of Serbia, St. Theodore Studite, St. Onuphrius the Great, St. Macarius the Great, St. John of Rila, and St. John Cassian the Roman.

A fresco from the refectory of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville.

and watchfulness of the mind?" They replied that they did not even know what these words meant. Having inspected the Holy Mountain, he settled finally in the skete of Magula, situated near the Philotheou Monastery, and there he found three monks who were engaged "not only in inward prayer, but also in contemplation."[8]

In the 13th and 14th centuries there occurred a new spiritual renaissance of the entire East. Mt. Athos became one of the spiritual centers. Professor Syrkou points out that Mt. Athos was of great significance in the inner life of southeastern Europe, particularly in the spheres of the enlightenment and preservation of pure Orthodoxy in Byzantium and among the Slavs. At that time Mt. Athos was the stronghold of Orthodox asceticism and of the Orthodox Faith itself. Among the Athonites there were many great men adorned with lofty ascetic labors and virtues; there were many erudite men of profound knowledge in contemporary sciences. They flocked to Mt. Athos from everywhere, from all parts of the Orthodox and heterodox worlds. From ancient times, Mt. Athos was a populous monastic republic which owned land in various places on the Balkan Peninsula. Emperor Michael Paleologus, in the *chrysobul*[9] given to St. Athanasius' Lavra in 1257, called Mt. Athos "a holy Mount, beloved by God and chosen to be His abode." Some of the Athonite ascetics did not regard scholarly work as being of primary importance, but the majority of them were obviously bibliophiles, judging by the huge libraries of some Athonite monasteries. A great ascetic or a great scholar would be a luminary to the entire Greek and Slavic world and would attract many disciples. Such great elders would instruct these disciples not only in inward prayer, but also in other spiritual matters or sciences, since Mt. Athos would render all the means possible towards this end. Mt. Athos kept and preserved the purity of Orthodox teaching and the inviolability of Church books. Among the spiritual leaders of the 14th century were St. Gregory of Sinai – who, while on Mt. Athos, promoted and defined the rule of silent mental prayer – his friend St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia, St. Gregory Palamas and several patriarchs of Constantinople.[10]

8. *Athonite Patericon*, Vol. I, p. 388. Also, Syrkou, *A History of The Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, Vol. I, p. 66.
9. *Chrysobul*: a document with a golden seal issued by government authorities *(editor)*.
10. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, pp. 55-60.



KAROULIA, MT. ATHOS
where hesychasts have dwelt for centuries.

Chapter Three

HESYCHASM

THUS, THE 14TH CENTURY was remarkable for a new spiritual renaissance in the East. This renaissance found its expression in hesychasm, which subsequently caused the well-known and lengthy "hesychast" disputes, where clashed the Eastern and Western world-views. The controversy generated great agitation in the political life of Byzantium. It ended with the implicit triumph of hesychasm; and the Orthodox Church formally adopted the doctrine of Divine Energies. What is the origin of hesychasm and what is its essence?

It all began with the arrival in Byzantium of Barlaam, a Calabrian monk, during the first years of the reign of Emperor Andronicus the Younger (reigned 1328-1341). Barlaam began to propagate the teaching of Abelard, which maintained that truth may be considered as truth only when proven by reason exclusively. He preached a teaching in addition to rationalism, that of Thomas Aquinas, which expressed the idea that God was wholly essence and that in Him essence and action were indistinguishable. All manifestations of Divinity were to be considered as created, even the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Contrary to this view, St. Gregory Palamas and his Athonite co-strugglers taught and proved by their lives that it was not by way of philosophical reasoning, but through constant purification of the soul, perfect stillness of feelings and thoughts, unceasing practice in theology and mental prayer or "mental activity" that man could attain enlightenment from above. However, man cannot behold the Essence of Divinity, which dwells in "inaccessible light" and is therefore beyond the reach of our limited created nature, but only the Divine Energies

(ενέργεια), describable as active motion. The word was used in this sense by Aristotle. "The emanation of God's Essence is usually revealed to hesychasts in the form of light, which can sometimes be seen also with bodily eyes."[1]

The collision between the Western and Orthodox world-views gave rise to many philosophic arguments and to discussions in the Church Councils. In this battle, the place of primary significance belonged to St. Gregory Palamas. His achievement consisted not only of the fact that he bore on his shoulders the heavy burden of the struggle for hesychasm, but also that he expressed and defined the mystical experiences of the hesychasts in clear and precise philosophical concepts congenial to the Orthodox Church. His defense of hesychasm finally resulted in the formal adoption of hesychast theology in the Church at the Council of 1352.

We should now pause to examine the essence of hesychasm.

Hesychasm is an old concept of the Eastern Church, and denotes an ascetic practice associated with the anchoretic way of life and stillness (ἡσυχία – stillness). In the early Byzantine period, hesychasm denoted the ascetic endeavor of a solitary desert-dweller (hermit). In the later Byzantine period, hesychasts were known as monks who devoted themselves to absolute silence, holy repose, inner spiritual concentration and unceasing "mental" prayer (νοερά προσευχή). This practice eventually led to a particular inexplicable state of blessedness, to the vision of a certain heavenly Light which is not of this world, uncreated and similar to the Light which surrounded the Savior on Mt. Tabor. Such a type of hesychasm was formed in the 14th century. Ancient asceticism contributed greatly towards the emergence of this spiritual type.

St. Simeon the New Theologian of the 11th century is usually considered the father of hesychasm. He was the first to clearly develop the teaching on the vision of God. However, "hesychasm" was not something entirely new. It began alongside the emergence of monasticism. "Mental prayer," as the means facilitating hesychia or stillness, was not an invention of 11th-century innovators. Long before that time, the founders of monasticism taught unceasing prayer as the means to strengthen "inward attention" and achieve sobriety of the heart.

Hierarch Porphyrius Uspensky found, in the libraries of Mt. Athos, 10th-15th-century anthologies with selections from ancient Patericons about prayer and inward activity. These prove that the sources of hesychasm stem from St. Anthony the Great (3rd century), St. Macarius the Great (4th century), St. John of the Ladder (6th century), etc. Already in his time, Abba Anthony taught about stillness: "Let us be men of silence and hesychasts." He instructed

1. *Manual for Clergy* (Kiev, 1915), p. 570.

Blessed Theodora on the necessity of becoming quiet and keeping silence, of sitting in her cell and recollecting the mind within herself. Blessed Theodora said: "Rest from cares, silence, and the innermost soaring of the mind constitute unceasing prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, help me."[2] The Jesus Prayer is often mentioned in the *Lausiac History* and other anthologies. The first noted hesychast-hermit on Mt. Athos was St. Peter the Athonite, who was actually the founder of hesychasm there. He had a number of followers. Mt. Athos had a remarkable hesychast center, a "hesychasterion" – "a place of stillness," later called Magula – which was built by a Georgian, Sabbas Khald, between the Iveron and the Philotheou Monasteries during the reign of Emperor Basil the Macedonian, at the end of the 9th century.

Hesychast ideology goes back to the mystical teaching of the ancient Christian Church. Of great significance was **St. Dionysius the Areopagite. St. Maximus the Confessor** (†662) introduced and adopted Dionysian mysticism into the Church. He searched for ways beyond reason and sense to attain closeness with Divinity. Both St. Dionysius and St. Maximus spoke of the inexpressible light which envelopes a man contemplating Divinity. The true spiritual founding father of Athonite hesychasts, however, was St. Simeon the New Theologian, the greatest mystic at the turn of the millenium, who clearly showed that the highest objective of ascetic endeavors was to behold the Divine Light. The main purpose of man's life was moral enlightenment through entering within oneself and spiritual concentration.

It is well known that the hesychast doctrine identifies the light perceived by some ascetics with the Light of Mt. Tabor which enveloped Christ during His Transfiguration. On these grounds, the opinion was formed that the doctrine of light was an innovation introduced by the 14th century hesychasts. However, the teaching on light had existed from the beginning of monasticism, while St. Gregory Palamas was only the first to refer to the Light of Mt. Tabor in his defense against opponents. At the time of the controversy, the hesychast teaching had already been completely formed. The only new thing which surfaced during these famous disputes, when the entire teaching of hesychasm was discussed, was the question of the physical method employed by ascetics during prayer in order to enhance concentration and intensify attention.[3] The period wherein this method originated cannot be precisely established. It was practiced from ancient times, and was passed down orally. Meanwhile, the moment in Church history arrived when an open discussion of the entire doctrine of hesychasm had become

2. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 65.

3. A particular bodily posture, control of the breathing so as to keep time with the recitation of the prayer, and centering attention in the upper part of the heart.

necessary in order that its formal and legitimate right to exist be acknowledged. Bishop Porphyrius Uspensky says: "The entire doctrine of Athonite hesychasts was not at all new to the 14th century. No. It had been treasured not only on Mt. Athos, but wherever there were men of silence . . . and it never embarrassed Christian society. But when it was discovered by the Calabrian monk Barlaam, the Church of Constantinople, usually sensitive to popular subjects of discussion, brought it out at the Councils." Archimandrite Cyprian explains: "It was precisely for this reason that in the Council decisions – the resolutions of 1341 and subsequent years – the Church came forward with a definite statement that the hesychast doctrine was in keeping with the spirit of Church tradition and with monastic experience."[4]

Hesychasm was conservative by nature and preserved traditions. The teaching on mental prayer was systematized and expounded by St. Gregory of Sinai on the precise basis of patristic teaching. "We know," continues Archimandrite Cyprian, "with what bitterness the Athonite hesychasts were attacked by Barlaam, Grigora and Acyndinus, and how many accusations were cast against St. Gregory Palamas. His name never left the lips of his contemporaries and abounded in statements of the Councils. But if St. Gregory of Sinai was the founder of hesychasm, why is there no mention of his name in any of the synodal or Athonite resolutions? It would have been natural to attack him as an innovator. The fact is, however, that hesychia and mental prayer are not innovations of the 14th century. . . . "[5]

Let us look at what constitutes the hesychast teaching. It is summarized by the following:

1. God's Essence (*ουσία*) must be distinguished from His manifestations (Energies) (*ενέργεια*).

2. Divine Energy is uncreated, as is God's Divine Essence.

3. The difference between the Essence and the manifestation of Divinity does not bring about any complication in the concept of God.

4. The Holy Fathers apply the word "Divinity" not only to the Essence of God, but also to His Energies.

5. According to the Holy Fathers, the essence is superior to its manifestation, as the cause is superior to its effect.

6. God's presence transcends the created world (is beyond the world), and is therefore inaccessible to the comprehension of man, who may behold God only in His manifestations – His grace (*χάρις*), power (*δύναμις*), love, wisdom, etc.

4. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 65.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

MOUNT SINAI
The Monastery of St. Catherine, dedicated to the Transfiguration, where lived Saints John Climacus and Gregory of Sinai.

The light of Mt. Tabor that radiated from the Lord during His Transfiguration is neither created light nor the Essence of God (*ουσία*). It is the grace-bestowing emanation of Divinity, the uncreated and eternal light, accessible to bodily perception, one of the forms of energy, always emanating from the very Essence of God.[6]

6. G. A. Ostrogradsky, "Athonite Hesychasts and Their Opponents," in *Transactions of the Russian Scientific Institute*, no. 5 (Belgrade, 1931), pp. 353-355.

ST. GREGORY OF SINAI
Icon by Photios Kontoglou.

Chapter Four

SAINTS GREGORY OF SINAI AND GREGORY PALAMAS

SAINTS GREGORY OF SINAI AND GREGORY PALAMAS became prominent on Mt. Athos during the golden age of hesychasm.

St. Gregory of Sinai (†1346)[1] was born in the 60's of the 13th century in Asia Minor. He received an excellent education. In his youth he was captured by the Turks. After being ransomed, he became a monk and spent some time in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. Hence, he is known as St. Gregory of Sinai. As he was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he stopped on the island of Crete, where he met the hermit Elder Arsenius, who taught him mental prayer. Subsequently he settled on Mt. Athos, where he spent time in lofty spiritual ascetic endeavors. Around him gathered disciples, one more remarkable than the other. He instructed them in mental activity. Besides his disciples, he taught everyone who came to see him. Thus, not only was he renowned on Mt. Athos, having influence and respect among Athonite brothers in general, but "almost everyone considered it a great misfortune not to have visited him and been vouchsafed to hear his teachings." These words were said by his biographer, Patriarch Callistus, who added that the power of St. Gregory's teaching left a deep impression on people due to its evocativeness. These people said: "When St. Gregory expounded about purity of the soul and how a man may become God through grace, then in our souls would awaken a kind of divine, irrepres-

1. Commemorated August 8.

sible longing for virtue and limitless love for God." "This makes it obvious," says Professor P. A. Syrkou, "that St. Gregory was a strong individual, highly endowed with the qualities of soul which made him an excellent preacher and disseminator of his ideas, inspiring in his listeners faith in this idea, because he himself was wholly imbued with it. This exalted ascetic 'compelled both the desert-dwellers and coenobites, and everyone else, to practice mental prayer and the guarding of the mind,' his hagiographer added. The turbulent spirit of the time compelled him to move out to Paroria in Thrace, bordering Bulgaria. Hence, many Bulgarian monks began to flock around him. Thus, in a note added to the handwritten codex of his writings we read: '. . . He was the first to instruct Bulgarians and Serbs in inward mental activity according to the tradition and art of the ancient Fathers.' St. Gregory's teaching on the principles of an austere ascetic life was disseminated not only among the Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs, but also in more remote regions, if not directly by him, then at least through his numerous disciples, who played an outstanding role in the Church history of southeastern Europe during the 14th century."[2]

St. Gregory formulated the general teaching on hesychia. His main work of 150 chapters is a treatise on mental prayer.

St. Gregory Palamas (†1360)[3] was also born in Asia Minor (probably in the last decade of the 13th century). He received a splendid education at the imperial court. Both of his teachers, secular and spiritual, instructed him in his youth in the practice of inward spiritual activity; and at the age of twenty, St. Gregory chose the monastic path. First he lived on Mt. Athos in St. Athanasius' Lavra, and later in the Glossia Skete, where he spent ten years in unceasing prayer, weeping, fasting and vigils. The Turkish invasion forced him to leave Mt. Athos. He went to Thessalonica, where he was ordained priest. Here again he led the life of an anchorite with twelve other brothers, communicating with them once a week. "At that time he was slightly over thirty years of age, and his perfect health and bodily strength did not fail him. But in order to subject his body in all its aspects to the spirit, he observed an extremely austere way of life which was difficult for his fleshly thinking and for his will. This proved to be of benefit to his brothers; they were edified by such an exalted model of monastic perfection." Indeed, according to his Life, where reference is made to his spiritual states, St. Gregory must have exercised great influence upon his monastic brothers. "It often happened that he would immerse himself in profound stillness, and tears would stream from his eyes. But whenever he opened his lips to speak, his listeners were sincerely moved in heart, became enthused and wept. In the hours following his periods of reclusion, and particularly after Liturgy, his face was glorious to behold, with wondrous divine light playing upon his features. During his life there, St. Gregory made friends with a simple Elder and man of silence, Job. Once, as the Elder was listening to St. Gregory's idea that not only ascetics but all Christians should pray without ceasing, according to apostolic command, he voiced his disagreement, objecting that unceasing prayer is the duty of monastics, not laymen. Gregory, who disliked verbosity, did not say anything in reply. But as soon as Elder Job returned to his cell and began to pray, an angel revealed to him that every Christian is obliged to pray, and that Gregory had spoken the truth."[4]

2. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, pp. 75 and 62.
3. Commemorated November 14 and on the second Sunday of Great Lent.

Subsequently, St. Gregory was elected Abbot of Esphigmenou Monastery, where he worked many miracles, such as turning fruitless olive trees and vines into fruit-bearing ones, filling empty containers with oil, etc. Later he entered a period of his life filled with struggles against the heretics Barlaam and Acyndinus. First he succeeded in disgracing them at the Council of 1341.[5] Later, however, as a result of intrigues on the part of the heretics, a new Council was convened in which the opponents scored a victory, while St. Gregory was thrown into a dark prison. He was released from the prison thanks to the intercession of the Empress. Then he was consecrated Bishop of Thessalonica, but his new flock rejected him and he returned to Mt. Athos. The Serbian King Stephan Dushan failed to persuade him to accept the chair of Metropolitan of Bulgaria. But even on Mt. Athos St. Gregory could not find rest, and he returned to Constantinople and settled on the island of Lemnos. Finally, the flock of Thessalonica requested his return and received him with great honor. St. Gregory once again was destined to endure heavy trials: he was captured by the Turks, who tortured him almost to death. He was ransomed by the Bulgarians. During the last three years of his life, St. Gregory worked many miracles. On November 13 (the day of St. Gregory's commemoration), St. John Chrysostom appeared to him and summoned him as a friend to come and share with him the peace of the mansions of Paradise. The next day St. Gregory died. "Higher, higher, towards the Light," were his last words.

The glorious blossoming of Mt. Athos left its traces in many spiritual writers, such as Patriarch Callistus of Constantinople, his friend Ignatius (both called Xanthopoulos), Callistus Kataphagiotes, Archbishop Simeon of Thessalonica, Monk Nicephorus, and Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople. They continued developing the views of St. Gregory of Sinai, particularly concentrating on

4. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, pp. 83-84.
5. Later the Barlaam heresy was exposed and its adherents anathematized at the Councils of 1347, 1351, 1352, and 1368 (already after the death of St. Gregory).

spiritual prayer. Later ensued another period of decline. It may be assumed that it was caused by the general disastrous situation on Mt. Athos under the Turkish rule (1371). This rule, however, was incomparably less cruel than the Latin domination. The Athonites had to pay tribute, and Mt. Athos was inaccessible to pilgrims because of the wars. Russia was the only sponsor of Mt. Athos during the 16th-18th centuries. On more than fifty occasions, delegations of Athonite monks came to Russia to collect funds, and each time they returned with gold and other treasures. The second half of the 18th century witnessed a rebirth of hesychasm. A Greek monk, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1747-1809), delved deeply into patristic writings, which he systematized in the course of many decades. He was particularly meticulous in his treatment of St. Gregory of Sinai and other hesychasts. His works were printed in the Greek language in Venice and published in 1782 under the title of *The Philokalia*. Elder Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-1794) translated this publication into Slavonic (called *Dobrotolubie*). This Slavonic-Russian *Philokalia*, reviewed at the Academy of St. Alexander Nevsky and in the Holy Trinity Lavra, was published in Moscow in 1793 through the efforts of Metropolitan Gabriel of St. Petersburg and Novgorod.

PART III

CONTACT WITH THE EAST

The Byzantine spirit, Byzantine principles and influence, like the complex tissue of a nervous system, penetrate the entire Great Russian organism. It is to them that Russia owes her past as well as her future.
(C. Leontiev, *Byzantinism and the Slavs*)

The teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church was passed on to Russia, one might say, together with the first ringing of Christian church bells; it has shaped and educated the native Russian mind, forming the basis of the Russian way of life.
(I. Kireyevsky, *On the Nature of Enlightenment in Europe*)

ST. ANNA OF KASHIN

An icon painted by Orlova (see p. 336) for the Kontzevitches, and printed in color by the author himself.

Chapter One

THE PRE-MONGOLIAN PERIOD

IN THE PRECEDING brief historical survey of Eastern monasticism, we have tried to bring out the essence of its spirit. Russian monasticism, being a branch of the same tree, breathed and lived in unison with Eastern monasticism, and all the spiritual phenomena of the East could not but find their reflection in the vast Russian land.

How were these contacts maintained, first during the pre-Mongolian period and later during the period of Muscovite Russia?

THE FIRST CHAMPIONS of Christian culture were Greek metropolitans and bishops with their retinue, who were appointed to serve in the Russian Church. However, Greek culture came to Russia not so much directly as by way of those Slavic countries which had adopted Christianity prior to the Russian people and had already had books translated into Slavonic. Thus, Bulgaria[1] passed on to Russia those writings of the Holy Fathers which had already been translated for Bulgarians themselves. The first enlighteners of the Slavs, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, having converted the Bulgarians to Christianity, provided them with translations of Scripture, service books and some writings of the Holy Fathers. The first edifying work of St. Cyril was "The Debate with Mohammedans and Jews in the Land of the Khazars"; the second was a Patericon (Anthology of Fathers), or brief anecdotes from the lives of ancient ascetics. An excerpt from

1. According to contemporary data, the first hierarchy after the Christianization of Russia came from Bulgaria.

the "Life of St. Codratus" (in the Imperial Public Library), according to paleographic data, is the oldest of all of St. Cyril's manuscripts and fragments known to us so far. The disciples of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the famous "seven,"[2] continued the brothers' work. St. Clement, Bishop of Velichi, was known as a translator of patristic writings. The end of the 9th century, during the reign of Emperor Simeon (888-892), became known as the golden age of Bulgarian literature in general. It was at this time that the *Golden Stream*, consisting of St. John Chrysostom's 136 sermons, was compiled. Well-known also was the Bulgarian Exarch John, who translated a book by St. John Damascene and the "Hexameron" [by St. Basil the Great], and ordered the translation into Slavonic of the "Life of St. Anthony the Great" written by St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria. Besides the above-mentioned men of literature there was a whole Pleiades of other translators. This early period also saw the translation of *The Ladder*, written by Abbot John of the Sinai Monastery, and his "Sermon to Pastors," which have been preserved in the 12th and 13th-century manuscripts with Bulgarian orthography of the 11th century. Thus, literature on contemplative asceticism existed already at this early period.[3]

Direct contacts with Byzantium were, on the one hand, maintained by the arrival of Greeks in Russia and, on the other hand, by Russians travelling to the East. Some travellers were drawn to Palestine, others went to Constantinople, Thessalonica and Athos. As noted by Metropolitan Macarius and Golubinsky, these travellers brought back with them the following holy things: the icon and shirt of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica, relics of Martyr Longinus and St. Mary Magdalene, a piece of stone from the Lord's Sepulchre, etc. Ties with Greece may also be traced in the Lives of Saints.

The founder of Russian monasticism, St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves Lavra, visited Mt. Athos twice. The traveller St. Ephraim the Eunuch sent the Studite Rule to St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, having copied it in Constantinople during his visit there. This Rule was compiled by St. Theodore the Studite at the beginning of the 9th century. At the end of the century it was already adopted for guidance by the Russian Church, and was observed until the middle of the 14th century, when it began to be superceded by the Jerusalem Rule. Describing their travels, Russians have left their notes: Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod, in the world Dobrynya Adreikovich, and Archimandrite Dositheus of the Kiev Caves. The former was in Constantinople at the very beginning of the 13th century. He saw the city and the famous church of Hagia Sophia before they were

2. The Seven Apostles to the Slavs, including Clement of Ochrid, Nahum, Angelorius, Gorazd and Sabbas *(editor)*.

3. About other translations, see *Orthodox Converser* (Kazan, 1859), pp. 235-263.

ravaged by the Crusaders in 1204, and he described his impressions when he returned home. Archimandrite Dositheus of the Kiev Caves visited Athos in the first quarter of the 13th century, and wrote about his travels when replying to someone about Mt. Athos and the Athonite monks. Only one excerpt of this description has been preserved, and it is very precious for the purpose of the present work: "Athonite novices obey the will of their elders and do everything with their blessing. Brethren who live separately in their cells observe the following rule throughout their life: every day they read half of the Psalter and recite the Jesus Prayer 600 times (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me). If someone wants to add something to this rule, he may do so at his own will. Moreover, they make between 300 and 600 prostrations. At all times, whether sitting, walking, lying down or engaging in handicrafts, they ceaselessly speak with heartfelt sighing: 'Lord Jesus Christ.' Illiterate monks recite the Jesus Prayer 7000 times, besides prostrations and the church rule. Physically weak or ill monks observe an easier rule. The elderly monks recite the Jesus Prayer *with attention of the mind* (italics mine), and make prostrations according to their strength. For the sake of God, Athonites like to keep silent and they avoid common talk, restlessness and worldly conversations. In Russia, holy fathers customarily read through the entire Psalter during Great Lent, but they do not read a single psalm at any other time. That is not the way the Athonites live: they observe the same rule throughout their life. Every monk must have an iconostasis [icon-corner] or a cross in his cell and recite the established rule before them. Illiterate monks must serve with their handiwork, obedience and cutting off of their own will."[4]

This fragment shows that Russians followed the spiritual life of Mt. Athos with great interest, not only out of idle curiosity, but with an effort to imitate this pearl of piety.

St. Anthony of Dymsk (†1224)[5] began his life as an ascetic in Khutyn Monastery in his youth. In 1187 he was sent to Constantinople to see the Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimus on ecclesiastical matters. He returned on the day of the repose of his Abbot, Barlaam. The latter had in spirit foreseen St. Anthony's return and appointed him as his successor. After a short while, St. Anthony renounced this office and established his own monastic community in Dymsk, on a hill overlooking a lake surrounded by a dense forest (near Tikhvin). His relics were found in 1330 and were hidden underground in 1409 before the invasion

4. Copies of this fragment were kept in the libraries of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra and of the Moscow Theological Academy. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II (St. Petersburg, 1866), pp. 202-203.

5. Commemorated January 17.

of the Tatars, who burned the monastery. The church bells, the Saint's iron hat (with a wide brim attached to the crown with nails) and the sacred vessels had been lowered into the lake.

The following travels in the 11th and 12th centuries should be mentioned: "In 1060 the monk Barlaam of the St. Demetrius Monastery travelled to Jerusalem to worship at the Lord's Sepulchre; later he set off for Constantinople, where he collected whatever he found useful to his fellow monks. He died in a monastery near Vladimir-Volyhnia and bequeathed everything to St. Theodosius' Monastery. In 1115, Abbot Daniel took a censer to the Lord's Sepulchre in Jerusalem and kissed with great love and tears the holy place, praying for his homeland, its princes and his friends, and finding there other pilgrims from Russia. Somewhat later **St. Euphrosyne, Princess of Polotsk** (†1173)[6] went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died there. During the 12th century, so many Russians wished to go to Jerusalem that the clergy were compelled to forbid these pilgrimages. **St. John, Metropolitan of Kiev** (†1089)[7] advised that penances be imposed on those who rashly vowed to go to Jerusalem, because 'such vows are ruining our land.' This phenomenon did not pass unnoticed by the people. It was mentioned in the folk legend of the famous pilgrimage of the Novgorod boyar Basil Buslaev."[8]

6. Commemorated May 23.
7. Commemorated August 31.
8. A. Yakhontov, *Lives of Saints as a Means of Education* (Simbirsk, 1898), p. 78.

Chapter Two

MUSCOVITE RUSSIA

THE 14TH CENTURY in Russia was not a period of "transition," as has previously been thought; rather, in its political and cultural movements it was the brilliant epoch of the "Russian Renaissance."[1] This high cultural movement was evoked in Russia by the approaching wave of the Byzantine renaissance under the Paleologues,[2] which embraced the whole Orthodox world. Hesychasm, which at this time had penetrated and inspired all cultural manifestations of life, could not but reach Russia together with the general wave of cultural activities. Muscovite Russia was not isolated at this period. On the contrary, the 14th century and the first half of the next century were marked in Russia by lively contacts with other Orthodox people, and in this way hesychasm, which was the soul of the Orthodox East, was communicated to Russia in various ways.

First of all, Russian literature at this time was under the influence of South Slavic literature. Secondly, throughout this period Bulgarian church figures had an immediate influence on Russia. Thirdly, Serbian art, penetrated by the spirit of hesychasm, made its influence felt in the Russian art of that time. Fourthly, a whole series of Russian metropolitans of this time shared the Palamite view (hesychasm). Finally and fifthly, during this whole time there existed an unbroken living contact with the East; this was expressed in the pilgrimages of Russians to the East and the coming of Greeks to Russia. We will now look at each of these phenomena.

1. Professor P. E. Kovalevsky, in *Manuel d'Histoire Russe* (Paris, 1948), p. 94, says that "this term was first used" by him and "was repeated by many scholars, both Russian and foreign."
2. A ruling family *(editor)*.

1. THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF THE SOUTHERN SLAVS

Russian literature received its impetus from South Slavic literature, and the first of its works were copied from those of the southern Slavs. After Bulgaria was subjugated by the Greeks (the battle of 1014), its cultural life suffered decline. The pre-Mongolian Russia of the 9th to 13th centuries enriched its literature in translation, and produced some original works. All this remained unknown to the southern Slavs. During the Mongolian period, Russia's cultural life came to a standstill until the middle of the 14th century. Everything that had been accumulated before the Mongolian invasion appeared now in a distorted form because of the frequent copying of the manuscripts, and needed correction. Meanwhile, beginning with the 13th century and during the 14th century, the southern Slavs had a period of cultural renaissance. They corrected all the available translations from Greek, and produced a significant number of new translations. These literary works were usually accomplished in Constantinople and on Mt. Athos, where the monasteries had rich libraries and were generally considered the centers of education.

In the 14th century, a small colony of Russian monastics was formed in Constantinople. One of the men was Abbot Athanasius of Vysotsk, of whom we will speak later. Another monk, according to Professor Sobolevsky, was Zenobius, probably the same Zenobius who was the Abbot of the Holy Trinity Lavra from 1432 to 1443 and who greatly contributed to this Lavra's library. Members of the Russian colony in Constantinople had contacts with the South Slavic (Bulgarian) colony. They would obtain books from the southern Slavs, copy them and then send the copies to Russia. They would also provide the southern Slavs with Russian texts unknown to the latter. They worked on Russian texts, checking them against the Greek originals. Moreover, some members of the Russian colony, who were more or less familiar with Greek, would undertake correction of Russian texts.

It may be assumed that at the time when Russian monks went to stay in Constantinople, the Russian monastic community on Mt. Athos must likewise have grown. However, Russian Athonites have not left many traces in the field of literature. They communicated only with the Bulgarians there. As a result, translations and original writings, which the Athonite Serbs had in their possession in the 14th and 15th centuries, remained unknown or virtually unknown to Russians.

South Slavic influence upon Russian literature was of great importance. Due to the above-mentioned contact with the southern Slavs, it became possible to correct the handwritten texts of church services and other books, and to supply Russia with a significant number of translations. Professor Sobolevsky testifies that by the time the South Slavic influence had waned, Russian literature "was almost doubled (in volume), and the newly obtained literary treasures were manifold, satisfying various needs and tastes and providing Russian authors with abundant source material." And "without this wealth we would have neither the writings of St. Nilus of Sora, nor our own *Chronicle* (the first Russian work on general history), nor the *Primer*, containing some articles on grammar and orthography."[3]

"The Holy Greek Fathers, including the most profound writers, were translated, read, copied and studied in the quietude of our monasteries, the holy embryos of our unrealized universities. Writings of Isaac the Syrian, the most profound of all philosophical writers," still exist in an ancient manuscript copy. "These monasteries had a constant lively contact with the people."[4] With these words the early Slavophile I. V. Kireyevsky defined the deep significance of patristic literature in the spiritual make-up of the Russian people.[5]

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3. Professor A. I. Sobolevsky, *South Slavic Influence on Russian Literature in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (St. Petersburg, 1894), pp. 8-15.

4. From an answer to Khomiakov, in *Complete Works of I. V. Kireyevsky*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1861), p. 198.

5. Many translations of that time have reached us, testifying to the treasures which filled libraries in those days. We will name a few of the Holy Fathers represented in them:

1. St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century): one copy of 1381, another of 1412 in the library of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra; a copy of 1416 in Tolstoy's library (Vol. II, p. 174).
2. Abba Dorotheus (†620), a disciple of St. John the Prophet of the Palestine Monastery (Gaza), and a great teacher himself: "Instructions to Disciples," a manuscript of 1414 of the Holy Trinity Lavra under Abbot Nicon. St. Dorotheus collected some written and oral instructions of Sts. Barsanuphius and John: Synodal manuscript of the 12th century, no. 27, 30 chapters on asceticism in the same manuscript.
3. St. Mark the Ascetic of Mt. Nitria (4th century). According to St. Macarius of Egypt, St. Mark received the Holy Mysteries not from him, the priest Macarius, but from an angel (see *The Lausiac History*). Chapters from St. Mark's writings were received from Constantinople by St. Athanasius of Vysotsk (14th century).
4. St. Hesychius, Presbyter of Jerusalem (†432) was in his youth a disciple of St. Gregory the Theologian. His "Teaching on Vigilance and Virtues" in Slavonic, on a parchment manuscript of the 14th century, was in the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra.
5. St. Maximus the Confessor (†662), martyr in the struggle against the monothelites. A learned philosopher, fruitful writer and a contemplative of unfathomable mysteries. The "Bee" of St. Maximus (an anthology) was translated for Prince Constantine Vsevolodovich in the 12th century. 400 chapters of St. Maximus were sent to Russia by St. Athanasius of Vysotsk. The writings of St. Gregory of Sinai were kept in the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra (library) in the codex of the 14th and 15th centuries.

2. BULGARIAN CHURCH FIGURES

The 14th century is the century of the flowering of hesychasm, which embraced the entire Orthodox East and from there spread into Russia. The inspirer of this movement was St. Gregory the Sinaite. As noted before, because of the anxieties of that time he left Mt. Athos and settled near the frontier between Byzantium and Bulgaria (in the present Thrace), in the wilderness called Paroria. At first the Saint suffered much from robbers, until the Bulgarian King John-Alexander built for him a monastery and a fortified tower, providing the monastery with everything necessary for its existence. For this royal concern St. Gregory was obliged to his disciple, the Bulgarian **St. Theodosius of Trnovo** (†1362),[6] who had been known to the King even before this.

The monastery of St. Gregory did not exist long. Soon after the Saint's death it was destroyed by the Turks. Then St. Theodosius returned to Bulgaria, where King John-Alexander built for him another monastery, called Kalitherovo. St. Theodosius had a vision: he saw "a mountain all filled with various flowers, and wondrous and diverse trees each filled with fruits, and a certain radiant man standing, who was commanded assiduously to gather the fruits." The Saint understood that this indicated the future glory of the place, that "this wilderness will be filled with monks who will bring forth the fruits also of a multitude of virtues," – which, as his Life notes, was soon fulfilled.[7] Professor P. A. Syrkou, speaking of the Bulgarian monasteries as spiritual centers and seedbeds of enlightenment, indicates that in the history of the development of the monasteries of Paroria and Kalitherovo there is much that is similar to the history of the development of the Palestinian monastery of St. Sabbas the Sanctified and, consequently, of the monastery of Mount Sinai, and that "to St. Gregory the Sinaite and his disciple St. Theodosius of Trnovo belongs the honor of having planted in Bulgaria the Rule of Mt. Sinai which, judging by the latest researches, is a modification of the Rule of Jerusalem or of St. Sabbas the Sanctified. Thanks to this Rule, the Bulgarian monasteries received a firm organization from the standpoint of discipline, management, and most important of all, education. Only from such monasteries could there come out such public figures as Patriarch Euthymius of Bulgaria and Metropolitan Gregory Tsamblak, who was raised in the latter's school" . . . and, we may add, St. Cyprian, Metropolitan of Kiev – the immediate personal conductors of hesychasm from Bulgaria into Russia.

6. Commemorated February 17.
7. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, pp. 162-163.

Let us look now at the narrative of Patriarch Euthymius, who was then the disciple of St. Theodosius, concerning his Elder: "Being the deputy of St. Theodosius at Kalitherovo, Euthymius was constantly in need of the former's guidance. Therefore, at stated times he went to St. Theodosius to receive instructions. Thus, once in the evening at the appointed time Euthymius went to his Elder and while still far off gave the agreed signal of his approach, but not hearing the Elder's call and after many times repeating the knocking which announced his approach, he hastened to his cell and, considering a bad sign the Elder's extraordinary silence even after knocking on the door of his cell, he went to a window, and an extraordinary sight presented itself to him: he saw St. Theodosius, enveloped from head to foot in flame, standing straight and unmoving, as the Prophet Samuel is usually represented, raising his hands on high and with his eyes directed straight to heaven. Euthymius was terrified at this vision and, leaving the Elder in peace, rushed to the monastery and immediately began to call the brethren with the bell to the midnight rule of prayer.

"On the following evening he again went to the Elder. This time the Elder sat before the door of his cell and awaited Euthymius and was weeping. When the latter likewise, falling face down at his feet, began to ask with lamentation why he was weeping, the Elder replied that the reason for this was a revelation to him from God in the vision of 'the capture of this land by tyrants [Turks] and the ultimate devastation of this beloved hermitage.' 'Take courage, O child, and may your heart be strengthened,' added St. Theodosius; 'you shall be worthy of the bonds and persecution of the Apostles.' " Thus St. Theodosius was the best example for Euthymius, who saw that his preceptor for his labors and asceticism had become worthy of the gift of clairvoyance.

Contemporary with Euthymius, or perhaps a little later, **St. Cyprian**, later Metropolitan of All Russia (†1406),[8] was raised and studied in Trnovo. Professor P. A. Syrkou is inclined to think that St. Cyprian lived a certain time at Kalitherovo in the monastery of St. Gregory the Sinaite, although there is no proof of this; in all likelihood, he at least became a monk in one of the monasteries of Trnovo. We gather from Gregory Tsamblak's funeral oration over St. Cyprian's grave that the latter came from the capital of Bulgaria (Trnovo), and was a member of the Tsamblak family. (He was Gregory Tsamblak's uncle on the paternal side.) Judging by the reference to "the church which brought him up," he had probably entered one of the local monasteries. In the same funeral oration, St. Cyprian is called *his own* in relation to Euthymius. Thus it appears that St. Cyprian was very close to Euthymius, or even related to him. "It is hardly

8. Commemorated September 16.

possible not to assume that Cyprian had spent some time in the Kalitherovo Monastery, together with (his relative) Euthymius."[9]

Metropolitan Cyprian left a great influence on Russian culture. He was a man of literature and a lover of books, and he engaged in translations into Serbian. He strove to carry out in Russia the liturgical reform of Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, a noted Palamite. It is probably to the time of Metropolitan Cyprian that there should be ascribed the acceptance of the canonization of St. Gregory Palamas, which occurred soon after the death of the latter, and thus almost simultaneously with the Greek Church.[10]

The Church historian Metropolitan Macarius gives the following opinion of St. Cyprian: " 'A man of all continence and full of divine reason and most learned.' He strove ceaselessly to teach the people fear of God and by his intelligent, inspired teachings delighted all. Loving silence, he would often go off alone to his country village of Golenishchevo, and there in a quiet refuge between two rivers, Setun and Ramesk, and surrounded by forest, he gave himself over to contemplation and reading the word of God, and copied books with his own hand. He was an expert in church canons, and was a zealot for church services and translated from the Greek several rites and services."[11] Metropolitan Cyprian himself testified of his devotion to the movement of hesychasm in his comments on Patriarch Philotheus: "And I, in my humility, was raised to the high See of the Metropoly of Russia by the most holy and wondrous Philotheus . . . who labored against the heresy of [the anti-hesychasts] Acyndinus and Barlaam, destroying their teaching by his instructions . . . "[12]

Metropolitan Cyprian sent for his nephew, Abbot Gregory Tsamblak, who arrived in Russia only after his uncle's death and went no further than Kiev. There, against the will of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Lithuanian Grand Prince Vitautus forced the local bishops to consecrate Gregory to the rank of Metropolitan of Kiev. He remained in this office until his death (1419). Metropolitan Gregory Tsamblak wrote the Life of Patriarch Euthymius of Bulgaria, whose pupil he was in his youth. He left behind cultural contributions as a writer and a composer of church music, as witnessed by his notes and melodies which have remained. Metropolitan Gregory was a firm defender of Orthodoxy.[13]

9. Syrkou, *A History of the Correction of Books in Bulgaria*, pp. 251-252.
10. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 9.
11. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. V, p. 183.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.
13. *Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia* (St. Petersburg, 1903), p. 684.

3. CONTACTS WITH SERBIA

From Serbia, hesychasm was passed on to Russia not through any church figures, as was the case with Bulgaria, but rather as a part of its general cultural influence.[14] Serbian art was of great significance in Russia. In the early 14th century, the Byzantine Empire under the Paleologues experienced a renaissance of Byzantine art, which lost its former abstract character and became more realistic: now evoking contrition, now dramatic or enchanting. Iconography became richer; it renewed itself by acquiring a new dimension and vitality. Harmonious hues, cleverly used, imparted an almost impressionistic character to a painting. This rebirth of art was analogous to the Italian Renaissance, although it had no direct ties with the latter. Various schools were formed, differing in their inspirations and style. The school in Constantinople produced the masterpiece in [what is now] the mosque of Kariye Djami, while the Cretan school produced the frescoes of Mistra.[15] This renaissance reverberated throughout the East, wherever Greek influence reigned. It was strongly felt in the Serbian-Macedonian school of painting (Macedonia was under Serbian rule from the end of the 13th century). This school adorned the churches of Macedonia and old Serbia, and the ancient churches on Mt. Athos. While adhering to the Greek style, the masters of this school contributed something individual to their art: their religious world-view and the spark of their own unique genius, thus leaving the mark of their national creativity in their paintings.

Many scholars are of the opinion that the Serbian-Macedonian school of painting found its reflection in the monumental Novgorod church paintings of the 14th century. Thus, Sychev in his *History of All Times and Peoples* notes that "in the 14th century the features of the Serbian-Macedonian school were clearly reflected in the art of Moscow and Pskov, and in the decorative frescoes of some churches in Novgorod (Kovalevo); and the style of this school was characterized by considerable clarity. . . . " The question of the Balkan influence upon Russian painting of the 14th century was very extensively and precisely exposed by two French scholars, Diel and Mille. The latter writes: "A significant Russian art movement with its center in Novgorod may be traced to the Macedonian school. Our iconographic studies confirm this conclusion." Diel wholly supports Mille's theses. V. Georgievsky, in his work *Frescoes of the Therapontes Monastery*, relates the Novgorod frescoes of the Volotov and St. Theodore Stratelates Monasteries to the Serbian frescoes of Ravanica, Kalenic, Manasija, Zica, Studenica,

14. With the exception of Pachomius Logothete – a Serb who came to the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra as a copyist and soon became famous as a literary figure.
15. Ch. Diel, *Histoire de l'empire Byzantine* (Paris, 1919), p. 213.

Ljubostinja, with regard to their soft, airy, greenish-blue background, and a special treatment of polished prime coating. Likhachev notes South Slavic influence on Russian illuminations and icons of the 14th century, particularly their similarity with the illuminations of the Serbian Psalter.[16]

The influence of Serbian painting is shown, of course, not only in the manner of preparing the primer and in external methods, but, first of all, in the subjects of painting and their treatment. In its art, Serbia expressed its spiritual make-up. What was this make-up? It was investigated in great detail by Professor M. Vasich of Belgrade University in his substantial study *Hesychasm in the Church and the Art of Medieval Serbia*.[17]

In 1219, **St. Sabbas of Serbia** (†1236)[18] established an independent Serbian Church, and this year was of threefold significance in the life of Serbia: in the history of its Church, its civilization, and its art. St. Sabbas was a hesychast in the true sense of the word: thoroughly imbued with the teaching of the ancient Fathers of the desert and the teaching of St. Simeon the New Theologian, he set the course which the spiritual life of Serbia has been following up to our days. St. Sabbas' successors on the Serbian archiepiscopal throne piously observed and kept his spirit. Archbishop Jacob was a disciple of St. Gregory of Sinai, and was known to have strengthened hesychasm within the Serbian Church. He was mentioned by Patriarch Callistus I of Constantinople, the biographer of St. Gregory of Sinai.

Later on, Vasich deals also with the Serbian Psalter (of Munich), the illuminations of which Likhachev considers to be the models of Russian icons and miniatures of the 14th century. Speaking of this Psalter, Vasich advances the authority of Mille, quoting his words: "Here a theologian must have guided the hand of the painter of the illuminations." In order to confirm this statement, Mille gives two examples: when describing the drawing illustrating Psalm 77:20, he quotes St. Gregory Palamas; and later, commenting on Psalm 44:10, Mille maintains that "the painter of the illumination was inspired by his contemporary, the theologian Gregory Palamas."[19]

Indeed, at the time when hesychasm flourished in the 14th century, St. Gregory Palamas enjoyed great prestige in the Balkans. According to his biographer, Patriarch Philotheus, the Serbian King Stephan Dushan (†1347) had a

16. Mikhailovsky and Purishev, *Essays on the History of Ancient Russian Monumental Painting* (Moscow, 1941), pp. 162-163.

17. M. Vasich, "L'Hesychasme dans l'eglise et l'art des Serbes du moyen âge," in *L'Art Byzantin chez des Slaves des Balkans* (Paris, 1930).

18. Commemorated January 14.

19. Vasich, "L'Hesychasm dans l'eglise et l'art des Serbes du moyen âge," pp. 110-123.

ST. SABBAS OF SERBIA (left) AND HIS FATHER ST. SIMEON

A 15th-century icon, located in the National Museum, Belgrade.

conversation with St. Gregory while on Mt. Athos, in which he invited him to come and live in Serbia. He offered him cities, churches and whole areas of land with a large income.[20] At that time the Saint was not appreciated by his Greek compatriots. Stephan Dushan, being a wise statesman, understood the great spiritual power of St. Gregory Palamas and, for the benefit of his country, tried to attract him to Serbia. However, St. Gregory declined this invitation and remained on Mt. Athos.

Thus Serbia of the 14th century was a progressive country in that it understood the significance of patristic teaching. As we have seen, its art, so vividly reflected in Novgorod, was imbued with hesychasm. For instance, the icons portraying the Lord's Transfiguration reveal the artist's aspiration to express graphically the Apostles' state of ecstasy at the vision of the Light of Mt. Tabor.[21] The Apostles' poses create the illusion that they are outside their bodies.

At this point, we will not dwell in greater detail on ancient Russian art, as it will be dealt with in a later chapter.

In conclusion, we will mention a circumstance characteristic of this age of spiritual unity of the entire Orthodox world. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the monasteries of Greece and the Slavic countries observed one and the same monastic rule, *i.e.*, the Rule of St. Sabbas the Sanctified (of Jerusalem). It may be assumed that the credit for this was due to St. Sabbas of Serbia, who emulated the life of his heavenly protector and twice visited the place of the latter's ascetic feats. He established a close bond between St. Sabbas the Sanctified and Serbia, where he introduced into the monastic life the rules of the Eastern monasteries (13th century). On his way from Palestine, on two occasions he stopped in Nicaea to visit the Emperors, to whom he was related. Both in Greece and in the rest of the Orthodox world, St. Sabbas enjoyed great respect and honor. It was at this time (the first half of the 13th century), according to Bishop Simeon of Thessalonica, that the Rule of St. Sabbas the Sanctified superseded all the previously observed rules throughout Greece, and became predominant. It was translated into Slavonic by Archbishop Nicodemus of Serbia at the beginning of the 14th century. In Bulgaria, it was shortly afterwards adopted by St. Theodosius of Trnovo and Patriarch Euthymius, as we have seen above. In Russia, the Rule was adopted by St. Sergius of Radonezh in his newly established monastery. The Jerusalem Rule was sanctioned for use in Russian monasteries by Metropolitan Cyprian.

20. F. Ouspensky, *Essays on the History of Enlightenment in Byzantium* (St. Petersburg, 1891), pp. 374-375.

21. Frescoes depicting the Transfiguration: in Kovalevo, 1380, and in the Volotov church, from the 70's and 80's of the 14th century.

4. THE PALAMITE METROPOLITANS OF MOSCOW

Metropolitan Peter of All Russia was succeeded by **St. Theognostus the Greek** (1327-1353).[22] According to all available data, Metropolitan Theognostus was a Palamite, although the Greek historian Nicephorus Grigora maintains the opposite. He says that Metropolitan Theognostus, as well as other archbishops, received the tome of the Council of Constantinople in 1341 which vindicated St. Gregory Palamas and accused his enemies Barlaam and Acyndinus. According to Grigora, Metropolitan Theognostus, having read the tome, threw it to the ground and "hastened to cover his ears lest he should hear the evil news; then he wrote a refutation of the statement, and reproached the Patriarch and the bishops, accusing them of godlessness and impudence . . . calling them persecutors of patristic traditions and pronouncing an anathema against them."[23] This account conflicts with other historical data, at least with the fact that it was not without Metropolitan Theognostus' influence that the Grand Prince Simeon Ivanovich sent a large sum of money to Emperor John Kantakusen, a protector of the Palamites, for the repair of a collapsed southern apse of the church of Hagia Sophia. Therefore, it is to be assumed that Metropolitan Theognostus did not reject the tome, but signed it. Indeed, the Moscow Synodal Library has preserved the 15th century Greek manuscript containing the Council tome of 1341 with the names of its signatories. According to a description of this manuscript by Archbishop Vladimir, Μητροπολίτης Ρωσίου . . . Θεόγνωστος was among them. Professor Golubinsky thinks that this was the same Metropolitan of Russia, for if there was a mistake or a misprint, then instead of Ρωσίου it would be Ρωσιας.[24]

The fact that Metropolitan Theognostus belonged to the Orthodox Palamites is indirectly confirmed by still another circumstance. When the opposing party prevailed, Metropolitan Theognostus was deprived of the income of his estate. A special metropoly was established in Galich, and all the dioceses of Volhynia were subordinated to it.[25] Thus, it is obvious that Metropolitan Theognostus had no influence at that time. His rights in Volhynia were re-established, however, as soon as the Palamites came to power. Metropolitan Theognostus was succeeded by Metropolitan Alexius.

St. Alexius, Metropolitan of Moscow (†1378),[26] was born into the family of Boyar Theodore Byakont of Chernigov. In his youth he "studied all books."

22. Commemorated March 14.

23. E. Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II (Moscow, 1900), p. 168.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

25. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. IV, p. 25.

26. Commemorated February 12 (born at the end of the 13th century).

At the age of twenty he joined the Theophany Monastery, where he was close to Stephen, the eldest brother of St. Sergius of Radonezh. His spiritual director was monk Gerontius — "an excellent monk and an honest and famous elder, who excelled in spiritual life." In the monastery, St. Alexius continued his literary self-education and read patristic writings. He became well-known everywhere. In 1340, he became an assistant to the elderly Metropolitan Theognostus of Moscow. He was entrusted with the legal affairs of the diocese and the metropoly. From that time on, St. Alexius formally participated in all the internal affairs of the Russian metropoly, as well as in external contacts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the course of more than twelve years (1340-1353), he apparently mastered Greek. According to a tradition, he prepared the precious translation of the Gospel [of St. John] from Greek into Slavonic.

In 1350, Metropolitan Theognostus became seriously ill, and his days were numbered. An appeal was addressed to the Constantinople Embassy concerning the appointment of St. Alexius as Metropolitan of All Russia upon the imminent death of Metropolitan Theognostus (†1353). In the same year St. Alexius was in Constantinople, where he spent two years; during the first year he was being prepared, and in the second year he was raised to the rank of metropolitan. Commenting on St. Alexius' enthronement, Nicephorus Grigora cast slander on him, without knowing him personally. Why such malice? Golubinsky explains this as Grigora's hatred for Emperor John Kantakusen and Patriarch Philotheus, who had elevated St. Alexius to the rank of metropolitan and who were both Palamites. Golubinsky expresses his strong indignation over this, calling Grigora "shameless" and "a dishonest historian." It is natural to surmise that if St. Alexius had not held the same views as the Patriarch and the Emperor, Grigora would have paid no attention to him and would not have harbored such malice against him.

The more Patriarch Philotheus learned about St. Alexius, the more the latter grew in his esteem. The Patriarch was a fervent Palamite, and had written the Life of St. Gregory Palamas and services commemorating him. If St. Alexius had adhered to a neutral position on the question of St. Gregory Palamas' teaching, such close contact with the Patriarch would not have taken place. Only shared views could have brought them together. As soon as St. Alexius had arrived in Constantinople, or shortly before that, an envoy came from Novgorod with a complaint against the late Metropolitan Theognostus, who for some reason had not wanted to give Archbishop Moses a cross-patterned vestment, after he had already given such a vestment to his predecessor. Patriarch Philotheus' reaction to this complaint was very kind. The Novgorod Chronicle for the year 1354 notes: "In the same year the envoy of Archbishop Moses of Novgorod re-

ST. ALEXIUS, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW

An icon of the Stroganov School, early 17th century

turned from Constantinople and brought him [Moses] the cross-patterned vestment and a charter from the Emperor and the Patriarch sealed with gold."[27] As time passed and the Patriarch learned more about St. Alexius, his next epistle to the Novgorod Archbishop was written in a different tone. On the occasion of St. Alexius' appointment as Metropolitan of All Russia, the Patriarch decisively urged the Novgorod hierarch to show an implicit and complete obedience to his new Metropolitan, St. Alexius. He also instructed him to appeal to the Patriarch only with the knowledge and consent of Metropolitan Alexius, except in the case that the latter should deprive him of the cross-patterned vestment which he, the Patriarch, had sent him. "You will find no help from us if, contrary to our expectation, you should show disobedience to your appointed Metropolitan."[28]

At all times, Metropolitan Alexius enjoyed Patriarch Philotheus' support. For example, the Patriarch deprived the disobedient and self-willed hierarch of Novgorod of his privilege to wear a cross-patterned vestment, threatening to deprive him of his rank as well (1370). In the same year Patriarch Philotheus sent an epistle to the Russian princes: "Since I am represented by the holy Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, who, as you all know, having seen his merits and his holy life, is an honest, pious and virtuous man adorned, by the grace of Christ, with all good qualities and the ability to tend your people, to guide them towards salvation, consoling those in sorrow and fortifying those weak in faith – it is your duty to honor and obey him." Thus did Patriarch Philotheus characterize Metropolitan Alexius. In his epistle to Prince Demetrius Donskoy, he was even more explicit. He wrote: "Being a God-appointed father to Christians in all lands and in compliance with my duty, I am obliged, and always endeavor, to care for their salvation, and I pray to God for them. But primarily I do this for your people, because it is amongst them that I have found Christ's people, who have the fear of God, love and faith. I pray for you and I love you all, I repeat, more than any others. I love Your Highness even more and I pray for you, as I would for my son, for your love and friendship shown to us, for your true faith in the holy Church of God, and your sincere love for and obedience to the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, our beloved brother in the Holy Spirit. We know that you are sincerely disposed towards him, love and completely obey him, as he himself wrote to us, making us love you and pray for you even more. My son, behave in the same manner, so that you may be assured of our prayers in the future; and you will have even greater gifts of grace: a life free of sorrows, an indestructible kingdom in the present life, and enjoyment of eternal good things in the life

27. Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II, pp. 171-225.
28. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. IV, pp. 39 and 42-46.

hereafter. . . . " The Patriarch addressed the Metropolitan himself with the following words: "You yourself know, and know very well, my love and kind disposition which I have for Your Holiness. My love and sympathy for you is of a special kind; I love you dearly, as a close friend, and wish to hear from you that we may know about you, about your pastoral work and your large flock. I know and am fully convinced of your love and friendship towards us, too. If you need something, write to us and be fully assured that we will honor your request."[29] A hesychast would write in this manner only to someone who fully shares his views.

We should now consider what we can learn from the historical data regarding the relations between Metropolitan Alexius and St. Sergius of Radonezh. The beginning of their relationship should be traced back to the time when St. Alexius was a monk in the Theophany Monastery together with St. Sergius' older brother, Stephen. Their monastic sojourn was not a lengthy one, but they became close friends. Epiphanius (St. Sergius' hagiographer) said that they were in spiritual communion and used to sing together in the church.[30] Soon both of them, the monk Stephen and the future Hierarch Alexius, became influential figures in Moscow. Stephen, who was appointed abbot of his monastery, became the spiritual father of the Grand Prince and some distinguished boyars. St. Alexius served as an assistant to Metropolitan Theognostus and became his right hand. Abbot Stephen did not break his contact with the Holy Trinity Monastery. He was a frequent visitor at the monastery and even lived there, as was mentioned in the Life of St. Sergius. In the middle of the 50's of the 14th century, Metropolitan Alexius himself visited St. Sergius. Epiphanius commented on this occasion: "This hierarch always loved the Saint, was in spiritual communion with him, and sought his advice in everything."[31] Metropolitan Alexius made this visit in the attempt to found a monastery in commemoration of his being saved from drowning at sea, and to ask the Saint to let his disciple **St. Andronicus** (†1395)[32] go to found this monastery, dedicated to the All-Merciful Savior (Icon Not Made By Hands). St. Sergius consented to this request, and visited the building site himself in order to give his blessing to the project. The monastery was finished in 1361 or, according to other data, in 1358-59. The spiritual communion between Sts. Alexius and Sergius was never broken, and St. Sergius always agreed to accomplish whatever tasks were entrusted to him by his archpastor. Being close to

29. *Ibid.*, 32-63, 324-333.
30. Epiphanius the Wise, *The Life of St. Sergius* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1908), p. 34.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
32. Commemorated June 13.

Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople, Metropolitan Alexius could not but draw the Patriarch's attention to his friend St. Sergius, and point to him as their fellow-hesychast. This happened in connection with Metropolitan Alexius' and St. Sergius' common wish to establish a coenobitic community at the Holy Trinity Monastery, regardless of objections raised by some brethren. It is assumed that Metropolitan Alexius asked the Patriarch to solve this problem. Patriarch Philotheus sent a kind reply to St. Sergius, in which he advised him to establish the coenobitic monastery and blessed the project. "I heard about your God-pleasing and virtuous life, and I praised it, glorifying God,"[33] stated this epistle to St. Sergius, showing how highly Patriarch Philotheus esteemed him. Approaching the end of his life, Metropolitan Alexius wished to have St. Sergius as his successor, but was unable to persuade him to consent.

The two great hesychasts, Metropolitan Alexius and St. Sergius, with whom none of their contemporaries could compare, were the founders of a new epoch of spiritual rebirth and the restoration of inward activity (the true Orthodox spiritual life), which had grown weak or been all but forgotten owing to Tatar incursions. The monastic blossoming in northeastern Russia was the fruit of the cooperation of these two lamps of the Russian Church: its head Metropolitan Alexius, and the great Elder of the Russian land, St. Sergius.

After a period of ecclesiastical troubles following the death of Metropolitan Alexius, the Russian Metropolitan See was occupied by Metropolitan Cyprian, whom we mentioned above (in connection with Bulgarian influences). He was followed by **St. Photius, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia** (†1431).[34] St. Photius was born in the Morean (Peloponnesian) town of Monemvasia. He became the head of the Russian Metropoly at the time when the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas had been already adopted and sanctioned by the Ecumenical Church. In his youth he was "the true friend" of Monk Joseph Briennios,[35] who addressed him in that manner in an epistle which has been preserved. Joseph Briennios was greatly renowned for his scholarship and his severe asceticism. In his edifying instructions and epistles he fought against Barlaam and Acyndinus. St. Photius' closeness to this hesychast was understandable, for he himself had spent the first half of his life in contemplative endeavors and in obedience to Elder Acacius. When the latter was appointed Metropolitan of Monemvasia, St. Photius followed him. In 1408, he happened to be in Constantinople on church matters, and was unexpectedly appointed Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia. The next year he arrived in Kiev, and in 1410 in Moscow. The city was ravaged

33. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, p. 354.
34. Commemorated July 2.
35. *Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia*, p. 383.

by the incursion of [the Tatar *murza*] Edigei, and by plague. Although his leadership began in difficult circumstances, Metropolitan Photius became one of the most zealous and caring pastors, showing the liveliest interest in his flock. Eight of his sermons, twenty-nine epistles and testaments have been preserved. Being an ascetic himself, Metropolitan Photius protected the existing monasteries and built new ones. Not approving of sham piety, he treated St. Paul of Obnora with mistrust when the latter first came to him and asked for permission to build a monastery. St. Paul did not become upset when his request was denied, but said, "God willing, the monastery will be established." That same night, Metropolitan Photius had a revelation about St. Paul. The latter was sought out in the morning and summoned to the Metropolitan, who offered him funds for the future monastery and even wanted to give his own clothing to St. Paul. When the monastery was built, he sent *antimens* and an epistle with instructions to the monks.

In 1411, Metropolitan Photius found himself in great danger when he went to the city of Vladimir on a visit. One of the princes of Nizhni-Novgorod, evicted from his lands by Prince Basil Dimitrievich of Moscow, suddenly and secretly sent a strong detachment of Russians and Tatars to capture the Metropolitan and demand a large ransom for him. On the eve of that day, St. Photius had departed to his estate on Holy Lake. Fortunately, he was forewarned about the imminent danger and hid in the forest thicket by Lake Senega, where he "stayed four weeks and three days in silence and prayer. There he remembered his former life in obedience to Elder Acacius in the desert; and seeing a deserted place while wandering through forest and wilderness in great silence, he lamented, sighing deeply, and was overcome by tender feeling."[36]

5. DIRECT CONTACTS WITH THE EAST

In conclusion, we will discuss the last of the aforementioned channels of Greek influence: direct communications of Russians with Greeks. Throughout the 14th century and until the middle of the 15th century, this communication continued unbroken. Greeks would come to Russia, and Russians would make journeys to the East. Let us first investigate what we know about the Greeks who lived in Russia. We have already mentioned Greek metropolitans who were

36. Barsukov, *Sources of Russian Hagiography*, p. 421. Other sources: Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. IV, and Professor Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II.

sent to Russia. The Church historian Metropolitan Macarius names four Greek bishops who were appointed to dioceses in Russia in the 14th century.[37] First we will consider **St. Dionysius, Archbishop of Rostov** (†1425).[38] This Greek Elder, Hieromonk Dionysius, came from Constantinople under Prince Demetrius Donskoy. The Sovereign received him with honors and sent him to live in the Theophany Monastery in Moscow. When, however, the monks from the Kamenny Monastery came to the Prince, asking him to appoint an abbot for them, the Prince gave them "as an abbot this Elder who had come from the Holy Mountain." St. Dionysius governed the above monastery for a long time, and lived a strict ascetic life. He cared for the well-being of the monastery, adorned its churches with icons, supplied books, and "adopted the Rule of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos)." He became well-known, and word about him reached the sovereign Prince. When the Rostov Bishopric became vacant, Grand Prince Basil Dimitrievich,[39] the son of Donskoy, summoned Abbot Dionysius to Moscow, where Metropolitan Photius consecrated him Bishop of Rostov. "He arrived in the city of Rostov during the plague. Bishop Dionysius assembled all the faithful of the city, with Archimandrites, abbots, priests and deacons. They served a *moleben*, and having blessed the water they sprinkled people with it. Oh, great is God's mercy! Through the prayers of the Most Pure Theotokos, the plague ceased its deadly course."[40] Bishop Dionysius was a spiritual founding father of an entire branch of northeastern monasticism: he was the spiritual director of St. Dionysius of Glushetsk, and gave his own name to the latter when tonsuring him. This Saint's Lavra produced seven monasteries, and in the course of two centuries glorified many saints.

In addition to metropolitans and bishops, many Greek priests and deacons came to Russia. Greek metropolitans were usually accompanied by a number of clergy. Thus, Metropolitan Photius came with **Presbyter Patrick**, a hieromartyr (1411).[41] He was a sacristan of the Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir, and during the above-mentioned attack of the brigands he managed to hide the church vessels under the arches of the cathedral. Despite cruel tortures inflicted upon him, he did not reveal their location.

37. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. IV, p. 303.
38. Commemorated October 18.
39. Grand Prince Basil Dimitrievich gave his daughter, Princess Anna, in marriage to Byzantine Emperor Manuel (1414).
40. Chronicles of Paisius Yaroslavov (15th century), in *Orthodox Converser* (Kazan, 1861), pp. 197-214.
41. Commemorated July 3. See Barsukov, *Sources of Russian Hagiography*, p. 421, and Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II.

Some individual ascetics arrived from Greece independently, as for example, **St. Lazarus of Murom** (1286-1391).[42] St. Lazarus, a Greek, first came to Novgorod. Archbishop Moses was well disposed towards him, and invited him to come and live with him. But St. Lazarus preferred the life of a hermit and departed to the Olonets district on Lake Onega, where he settled on the islands called Much (in Murom Lake). He bought this island from a certain Novgorod governor, who returned the money to St. Lazarus shortly before he died. Archbishop Moses blessed St. Lazarus' intention to live as a hermit, and prophesied that his hermitage would flourish. St. Lazarus suffered attacks from pagans (Laps). A miraculous appearance of an icon gave him strength. St. Lazarus happened to heal a blind Lap boy, the son of their leader. Soon the Laps asked to be baptized, and many of them became monks. St. Lazarus then set off for Novgorod, where he received *antimens*. He subsequently erected a church in honor of the resurrection of Lazarus, making use of the money which had originally been used to purchase the island. Two monks from the Kiev Caves Lavra joined the monastery and built there a church dedicated to the Dormition. Soon afterwards there arrived the Athonite Elder Theodosius, a severe ascetic who wore chains on his body. This Elder became the monastery's superior (abbot) following St. Lazarus' death. In the 15th century, St. Athanasius of Murom was glorified in this monastery.

Then there was **St. Sergius of Nurma** (1421).[43] According to tradition, he was of Greek descent. It is well known that he came from Mt. Athos to see St. Sergius of Radonezh. Having spent some time there, he left for the Vologda region near the river Nurma (a tributary of the river Obnora), being drawn to the life of a solitary. Shortly afterwards, monks and laymen began flocking around him. *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*, commented his hagiographers. As we have observed, these words of the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 9:22) are usually quoted in the Lives of those saints who may be considered elders, as for example Abba Dorotheus, and they are also frequently quoted in the Lives of Russian saints. Apparently, this expression indicated that a particular holy man was active in eldership. It was also used as an epitaph on the grave of Optina Elder Ambrose.

One day, St. Sergius discovered the presence of St. Paul of Obnora in the vicinity of his monastery. He found him standing near his cell and feeding birds from his hands. Many birds were perched on his head and shoulders, while a bear, a fox and a hare were standing before him. St. Paul had attained a state of dispassion (ἀπάθεια), and therefore all creatures obeyed him, as they had obeyed

42. Commemorated March 8.
43. Commemorated October 7.

Adam in Paradise. St. Paul would recieve Holy Communion from St. Sergius and confess his thoughts. It should be added that this confession of thoughts was mutual. When it was time for St. Sergius to go home, St. Paul would accompany him two-thirds of the way. Later, a chapel was built to mark the spot of their farewell. One time St. Paul told St. Sergius that he heard the church bells ringing and saw a light brighter than the sun. St. Sergius prophesied that a monastery would be established there, and urged St. Paul to erect a church in the name of the Holy Trinity. St. Paul's monastery was founded about three miles away from St. Sergius' monastery.

Let us now look at the journeys of Russians to the Orthodox East. Archbishop Basil of Novgorod went to Jerusalem in the first half of the 14th century, before he was elevated to the rank of bishop (1329). In the middle of the same century, Stephen of Novgorod went to Constantinople with eight companions, and described his journey.[44] Toward the end of the same century, Hierodeacon Ignatius of Smolensk described his journey to Constantinople and Jerusalem. He commented that in Constantinople he and his friends were met and kindly treated by the *Rus'* (Russians) who lived there, especially by those living in the Monastery of St. John the Baptist. Among other Russians, there lived there at that time a disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh, Athanasius, abbot of the Vysotsk Monastery. Detailed travel notes were also left by Deacon Alexander, who visited Constantinople at the end of the 14th century on business, *i.e.*, with the purpose of trading.[45]

We should name another disciple of St. Sergius — **Epiphanius the Wise**, who wrote the Saint's Life in 1418. He had come to St. Sergius from Rostov, for fourteen years before the Saint's death. According to Epiphanius himself, in Rostov he lived together with St. Stephen of Perm, and they both pursued education. He said of St. Sergius: "He did not go searching for anything to the Imperial City (Constantinople), or to the Holy Mountain, or Jerusalem, as did I, the accursed one, deprived of reason, who crawled here and there, going by sea and land from one place to another." This indicated that Epiphanius himself had visited the places he mentioned. He died around 1420. He has not been canonized.[46]

St. Theodore, Hierarch of Rostov (1395),[47] St. Sergius' nephew, was tonsured at the age of twelve. Day and night he confessed his thoughts to his uncle, the Elder. One of the thoughts kept recurring, namely, his wish to establish a coenobitic monastery. St. Sergius saw this thought as an expression of God's will, and thus the Simonov Monastery was established. Abbot Theodore enjoyed general respect and love; and St. Sergius, fearing that his nephew would fall into pride, continually prayed to God for him. St. Theodore travelled four times to Constantinople on ecclesiastical matters, and on a mission sent by Grand Prince Demetrius Donskoy, whose spiritual father he was. He was well thought of in Constantinople by Patriarch Nilus, who raised him first among the archimandrites and designated the Simonov Monastery to be *stavropegial*, *i.e.*, subordinated directly to the Patriarch. At the end of his life, St. Theodore was made Archbishop of Rostov, where he also died. Among his disciples he brought up many great and renowned ascetics, as for example St. Therapontes (commemorated May 27) and St. Cyril of White Lake (commemorated June 9).

St. Athanasius of Vysotsk (†after 1401)[48] lived a strict ascetic life under the guidance of St. Sergius and was in complete obedience to him, thus acquiring an ability to guide others. He founded the Vysotsk Monastery in Serpukhov, and was an elder of St. Nikon of Radonezh. St. Athanasius was a learned man who copied books and drew instructions from Sts. Basil the Great and Isaac the Syrian. He left the position of abbot "for the sake of God," that is, for "inward spiritual activity." When accompanying Metropolitan Cyprian to Constantinople, he settled there in the Monastery of St. John the Baptist (Studium) as "one of God's poor ones." There he continued copying books. In 1401, he copied and sent to Russia a Rule called "The Eye of the Church." His disciple, according to his instruction in 1392, copied an anthology of patristic writings (400 chapters [Four Centuries] of St. Mark the Ascetic, a Homily by St. Simeon the New Theologian, and several homiles by Sts. John Chrysostom and Isaac the Syrian). "Having lived in silence (hesychia) with holy elders, the Saint passed to the Lord in deep old age." Archimandrite Leonid, in his book *Holy Russia*, wrote that St. Athanasius died and was buried in the former Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Constantinople, where he had retired in 1387.[49]

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44. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. IV, pp. 304-305.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

46. Barsukov, *Sources of Russian Hagiography*. Metropolitan Philaret assumes that Epiphanius is the author of "The Tale of the Journey to the Holy City of Jerusalem" *(Survey of Russian Spiritual Literature)*.

47. Commemorated November 28. See Epiphanius the Wise, *The Life of St. Sergius*, p. 94.

48. Commemorated September 12.

49. Professor G. Fedotov (*The Saints of Ancient Russia*, Paris, 1931, p. 149) wrote that: "There is good reason to identify St. Sergius of Radonezh's disciple Athanasius, the abbot of Serpukhov, with Athanasius Rusin, who during his visit to Mt. Athos in 1431 had copied a collection of Lives for the Holy Trinity Lavra 'under the wings of Gregory Palamas.' " However, Professor Sobolevsky (*South Slavic Influence on Russian Literature in the 14th and 15th Centuries*, pp. 13 and 18) mentions both Athanasii as separate identities. Athanasius Rusin returned to Russia in 1436, While Athanasius of Vysotsk remained in Constantinople for good.

St. Arsenius of Konevits (†1447),[50] born in Novgorod and a coppersmith by trade, went through his first steps of monastic obedience and ascetic labors in one of the Novgorod monasteries near the Khutyn Monastery [and in Valaam Monastery] for the course of eleven years. In 1373 he made a journey to Mt. Athos, where he received the coenobitic Rule and an indication to found a monastery in the Far North. When he was travelling in the northern region, a storm carried his boat to the island of Konevits [near Valaam]. There he erected a cross (1393). For five years he lived as a hermit in complete isolation, and then established a coenobitic monastery in 1398. After that, St. Arsenius once again went to Mt. Athos.[51] Such a long and difficult journey could be justified only by the necessity of receiving spiritual instructions concerning inward activity. At that time, the teaching of Sts. Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas was especially flourishing on Mt. Athos.

St. Sabbas of Vishera (†1460)[52] made a journey to Mt. Athos around 1411, and spent about three years there. In his Life we read that "from the subsequent life of the Saint it is obvious that the impressions gained on Mt. Athos remained in his soul for a very long time." Upon his return, he settled on the Vishera river, and then on the river Sosnitsa; but the monastery he founded on the Vishera. He also labored on a pillar. "Monastics and laymen kept coming to him in streams for spiritual benefit." In other words, he was an elder.

St. Cassian, Abbot of Kamensk (a contemporary of St. Cyril of White Lake) had been abbot in St. Cyril's Monastery for many years and was an eyewitness of St. Cyril's miracles. Grand Prince Basil Vasilievich and Metropolitan Jonah sent him twice to Constantinople on ecclesiastical missions to the Patriarch. When he [St. Cassian] returned from Constantinople to Moscow, Grand Prince Basil Vasilievich honored him and, having given him what was needed for the monastery, let him go to Kamensk, where he had been tonsured. Abbot Cassian reposed in Kamensk, and his body was buried on the south side of the church. When he died, his face was as radiant as the sun. This took place during the reign of Grand Prince Ivan Vasilievich (Ivan III). In the Menaion, for the day of the commemoration of St. Ioasaph of Kamensk, we read that Abbot Cassian governed the Kamensk Monastery from 1469.[53]

St. Euphrosynus (Eleazar) of Tolva, near Pskov, (1385-1481)[54] also journeyed to the East. In Constantinople he visited the silent ones and desert-dwell-

50. Commemorated June 12.
51. *Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia*, p. 1057.
52. Commemorated October 1.
53. Chronicles of Paisius Yaroslavov, in *Orthodox Converser* (Kazan, 1861), pp. 21-211, and Barsukov, *Sources of Russian Hagiography* (St. Petersburg, 1882), p. 285.
54. Commemorated May 15.

ST. ARSENIUS OF VALAAM AND KONEVITS

17th- century icon from Valaam Monastery.

ers. Having become acquainted with monastic life in the East, after his return he was no longer satisfied with life in the Snetogorsk Monastery, and so founded his own, the Tolva Monastery. He was neither a priest nor an abbot there, but an elder and instructor of the monastery's brethren, "as a man of iron dealing with those of iron." In this monastery, the book of St. Isaac the Syrian has been preserved with an inscription: "In the year 6980 (1472) this book by St. Isaac the Syrian was copied by the hand of a great sinner, Monk Ignatius, as ordered by his master, Elder Euphrosynus, and with the blessing of Abbot Charalampus." Thus, an elder commanded, and an abbot blessed.

In the sphere of spiritual contemplative monastic life, there particularly stood out St. Nilus of Sora (†1508). Together with Innocent Okhliabinin he made a journey to the East. His writings were of great significance for Russian monasticism and the history of eldership. They influenced also St. Paisius Velichkovsky, who subsequently restored Russian eldership in the 18th century. We will talk of St. Nilus of Sora later in the present work.

To conclude, we may say that the whole character of this epoch can be summed up in that symbol of spiritual rebirth and lofty spiritual *podvig* which bears the name hesychasm, and which leaves its stamp on all manifestations of ecclesiastical and cultural life. All these manifestations – whether of literature or art, or the coming to Russia of church dignitaries, or the direct mutual contacts owing to frequent journeys – contributed to the dissemination in Russia of this spiritual movement.

PART IV

RUSSIAN MONASTICISM

(10th-17th Centuries)

It was not by a sword that we have acquired our land, but by Thy right hand and Thy strong arm; by the light of Thy countenance, by the tears, endeavors, sweat, blood and teaching of Thy saints has our country become strong.
(From the Service to All Saints of Russia)

THE MIRACLE-WORKING KIEV CAVES ICON
OF THE MOTHER OF GOD (SVENSK)
with Sts. Anthony *(right)* and Theodosius *(left)*, painted by St. Alypius
of the Kiev Caves, based on actual portraits of them, circa 1288.

Chapter One

KIEVAN RUSSIA
(10th-13th Centuries)

1. THE CHARACTER OF THE EPOCH

CHRIST'S TEACHING was embraced by the Russian people with a childlike simplicity and spontaneity, and this attitude formed the basis of a special feature of the Russian spirit of harmony, namely the equilibrium of all the inner powers of man: the mind, the heart and the spirit. The enlightener of Russia himself, St. Vladimir, fully personified this harmonious type. Also characteristic of this is the testament of Vladimir Monomakh. With the course of time and under the influence of unfavorable historical conditions, this feature became less obvious; but a hundred years ago Ivan Kireyevsky envisaged a rebirth of this harmony, or "Orthodox wholeness." which was observed at the dawn of Russian Christianity.[1]

In 1938 a book came out (in German) by W. Schubart, a professor of sociology and philosophy at Riga University, in which he shared and further developed Kireyevsky's ideas.[2] He said that the "Russian soul (like the soul of Western man in the Gothic period) was entirely orientated towards harmony." He gave a few examples to illustrate the sense of measure which lies at the basis of the Russian soul, and which had also characterized the ancient Greeks. Point-

1. "The living faith of the nation in the Holy Orthodox Church, the memory of its past history, and the surviving traces of the wholeness of its existence are the pledges of its rebirth." Kireyevsky, *Complete Works,* Vol. II, p. 333. See also pp. 276, 277, 237.

2. W. Schubart, *L'Europe et l'ame de L'Orient* (Paris, 1949).

ing to the absence of exaltation in Russians during prayer, and quoting Aeschylus, Professor Schubart noted that the ancient Greeks observed the same rule, prescribing tranquility and a certain rhythm at prayer. "The same sense of harmony is witnessed in Russian iconography and in the ancient Russian art of painting in general. This sense of harmony inspired Andrew Rublev (1370-1430) to paint his icon of the Most Holy Trinity in perfect form. It also inspired the master Dionysius. Ancient Russian architecture is imbued with the same sense of dignity and peace: consider, for instance, the church dedicated to the Most Holy Virgin at Nerl, near Vladimir (1165), and the church of St. Demetrius in Vladimir (1194), both of which are an embodiment of harmony. And, finally, we find it expressed in the classical architecture of Alexander I's reign. . . . Europe knows absolutely nothing of Kievan Russia. One should not be surprised at the existing prejudices, and that such men as Spengler, for instance, could express opinions tending to present Russia as an embodiment of apocalyptic hatred directed against ancient culture. Such opinions are not in keeping with the truth, if one considers the old Russia of the 10th to 15th centuries. It is also a mistake to identify Russia with the name of Dostoyevsky. Pushkin, too, was a Russian, and he was more disposed towards harmony than Goethe and was closer to the Greeks than the author of *Faustus* by virtue of his inward sincerity and his radiant aesthetics. The Russians, too, had their Gothic (harmonious) era, during which they embodied harmony in a more perfect form than the West did."[3]

How could the spirit of a Russian man have become imbued with ancient harmony? It was because, along with Christianity, the Russian soul embraced the spirit of the Holy Fathers. As Kireyevsky said: "The teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church was passed on to Russia, one might say, together with the first ringing of Christian church bells; it has shaped and educated the native Russian mind, forming the basis of the Russian way of life."[4]

Christianity, which realizes on earth the highest harmony, was able to adopt the needed elements from ancient Greek culture, since Greek culture, too, was an achievement of harmony, earthly and unillumined though it was. Thus, in Hellenism the Holy Fathers found the necessary forms to express their world-view in already developed concepts and categories. They transformed ancient Hellenism. "A transformed Christian Hellenism permeates history," says Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky. "Hellenism was immortalized in the Church, as it were; it was introduced into the very fabric of ecclesiastical life, as an eternal category of Christian existence. It is not a question, of course, of ethnic Hellenism, nor of contemporary Hellas. What is meant here is 'Christian antiquity,' the Hellenism of dogmatics, the Hellenism of the Liturgy, the Hellenism of the icon."[5]

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-90.
4. Kireyevsky, *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 259.

The Eastern world-view, directed towards heaven and imbued with harmony, has left its imprint of light, lightness and winged inspiration upon the basis of Russian culture.

"Now, thanks to the publication of the Ipatiev Chronicle and many other works of church literature, this light-bearing ancient Russia stands resurrected before us. It is lit with joy and festive radiance. The multi-tribal population around Kiev, the trade routes to Greece and other lands passing by or through Kiev, the continuous contacts with Byzantium and Western Europe, the church feasts and councils, the gatherings of princes, people flocking from all over the country to form a combined military force in Kiev, the prosperity of the citizens, the multitude of churches (as attested by visiting foreigners), an early awakened quest for education, along with a certain ease of relationships between people of different ranks and social classes, and finally, an inner unity of life so clearly observed and expressed by Russia's ancient chronicler – all this together points to the conditions and rudiments of enlightenment. Not all of this, however, was passed on to the Russia of Vladimir and Galich. The Kievan period knew of no narrow discrimination, nor the severe ignorance characteristic of later periods." This is what the Slavophile Y. F. Samarin wrote almost one hundred years ago. . . .

"Kievan Russia was renowned and attractive in the eyes of the outside world. It was an internationally significant power, and its capital city attracted attention as one of the most important centers of Europe at that time. Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev was hardly exaggerating when referring to Kiev, the city of Yaroslav the Wise, as a city resplendent in greatness." Western European chroniclers praised it even more highly. Thus, in the middle of the 11th century, Adam of Bremen spoke of Kiev as the rival of Constantinople, and a few decades earlier Ditmar described Kiev, mentioning its four hundred churches, eight markets and countless people. The international significance of Kiev may be assessed by the close blood-relationship of St. Vladimir's family with the then-ruling dynasties of Byzantium and Europe. Prince Vladimir's children and their descendants had relatives in England, France, Germany, Poland, Hungary and Scandinavia. Politically, Kiev was not an out-of-the-way place, but the capital of a powerful state, in grandeur surpassing almost any of the national state formations of the West and displaying features of an imperial scope."[6]

5. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, P. 509.
6. Professor Cyril I. Zaitsev [later Archimandrite Constantine of Jordanville], *Kievan Russia*, (Shanghai, 1949), pp. 103-105.

The rich culture of the Kievan period followed its own original creative path. Professor Kovalevsky notes that "the Kievan period was one of the most splendid epochs of Russian history, when the nation was aware of its unity, when its culture reached its highest point of intensity and created the most perfect works in architecture, painting and poetry."[7]

Kievan iconography, church architecture and applied arts reflected primarily Greek influence. However, according to Professor Cyril I. Zaitsev, "one may observe influences other than the Byzantine as well, even in the first churches erected in Russia. Specialists have detected, in the art of ancient Russia, traces of the East (particularly of the art of Armenia and Georgia), of the Scandinavian North and the Latin West." "One may trace various influences in ancient Russian art," says the well-known Russian painter Lukomsky, "nevertheless, the native Russian elements in it are predominant." Generally, the astonishing thing is that Russians did not remain customers, imitators and learners for long. Beginning in Novgorod, Russian churches soon acquired an original, native style, as one may observe even today. "St. Sophia, if one looks at it from the Volkhov bridge, looks like a great palladium, just as it was for Novgorod in the thousand years of its existence. The brilliantly conceived masses of the cathedral are crowned with five domes, striking in their artistic conception, and with a particularly beautiful silhouette of the middle dome, incomparable in its delicate lines," commented Schusev and Pokrovsky. A. I. Nekrasov, another researcher of ancient Russian art, in discussing the churches of Novgorod and their master-builder, Peter, commented as follows: "The simplicity and grandeur of master Peter's cathedrals are unsurpassable. . . . Master Peter sought to achieve the greatest effect with the simplest means. . . . Although distorted, Peter's structures even now create an indelible impression."

"St. Alypius, a monk of the Kiev Caves, became famous in the sphere of iconography. There appeared new original compositions [hymns] for church choirs, such as were required by church life. Thus, at the end of the 11th century, mention was made of Gregory, the Russian composer of Canons. However, both in iconography and in church music, the primary significance lay not so much in individual original works as in changes in the existing style. Ecclesiastical creativity as a whole became imbued with a national spirit."[8]

With regard to church literature, we will quote Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky: "We may pass a rather firm judgment on the impact that the adopted Byzantine-Christian literature and culture had on Russia. . . . Several names are particularly relevant to this discussion. One is Metropolitan Hilarion,

7. Professor P. E. Kovalevsky, *The Historical Path of Russia* (Paris, 1949), p. 21.
8. C. I. Zaitsev, *Kievan Russia*, pp. 170-171.

best known as the author of the remarkable sermon *On the Law of Moses Given to Him by God and on Grace and Truth*, which even that constantly carping Golubinsky was compelled to describe as 'an impeccable academic speech with which among modern speeches only those of Karamzin can be compared: he was not a rhetorician of the least distinguished days of Greek oratory, but a true orator during its flourishing period.' Golubinsky deemed Hilarion's sermon worthy to stand alongside *The Lay of Igor*. Indeed, it is an exemplary model of oratorical skill. The language is free and simple. It discloses the intensity of Christian experiences and it possesses a well-made and translucent structure. The sermons of Cyril of Turov belong to the same literary type. . . . One must also mention Clement Smolyatich: 'Such a philosopher there has not yet been in the Russian land,' the Chronicle says of him. He wrote 'from Homer, from Aristotle, and from Plato.' Mention, too, should be made of St. Abraham of Smolensk. To be sure, these men were part of a minority, or if one prefers, of an ecclesiastical intelligentsia. During these early centuries there were no theologians in their ranks. But there were men of genuine Christian cultivation and culture. They made the first flights of Russian Hellenism."[9]

The Lay of Igor, brilliant in its poetical inspiration, could have been written only in the years of the highest development of Russian architecture and painting, when the best Russian frescoes were being created. It was not an isolated work, as has been supposed for a long time, but rather an indespensable link in that great whole which we call Kievan culture.

This culture flourished until the Tatar invasion. In 1222, the splendid cathedral of the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos was built in Suzdal, and the first years of defeat produced *The Story of the Destruction of the Russian Land*.[10]

2. ST. ANTHONY OF THE KIEV CAVES

St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves, an ascetic of the 11th century, was the founder of Russian monasticism. In the preceding chapter we mentioned two of

9. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, pp. 7-8. The following is an excerpt from Metropolitan Hilarion's prayer: "As long as the earth exists, save us from foreign hands; and let not Thy people be called a lost people, and Thy flock – strangers in a foreign land. Let not other nations say, 'Where is their God?' Do not send us sorrows, hunger, and useless death by fire and flood, that Thy fainthearted people may not despair. Punish us a little, but then show us Thy great mercy; wound us a little, but kindly heal us; send some sorrows upon us, but give us joy in our sorrows; for our nature cannot endure Thy wrath for long, as stalks cannot endure fire . . . . " Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. I, p. 279.
10. Kovalevsky, *The Historical Path of Russia*, p. 21.

his journeys to Mt. Athos. What he observed in the East was to form the basis of his spiritual make-up. What kind of picture then unfolded before the eyes of an attentive Russian monk? It was a period when the inclination towards monasticism had reached its highest point, when Byzantium, as noted previously, formed a net of monasteries. One could observe a basic predisposition to monasticism. This tendency was patronized by the emperors, in particular by the monk-loving Macedonian dynasty. Emperors themselves became monks. (Thus, in the 11th century, seven out of fifteen emperors were tonsured.) Members of the imperial house, noblemen and priests, people of all classes and often entire families embraced monasticism. Professor Archimandrite Cyprian says that "one may safely speak of dynasties and families of saints."[11] Anyone who had the opportunity considered it almost his main obligation to erect a new monastery. It was an opportune time for the activity of elders, and the practice of the Jesus Prayer which accompanied this activity. This was the time of St. Simeon the Reverent, St. Simeon the New Theologian and many other saints – contemporaries of St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves.

On Mt. Athos, where St. Anthony embraced monasticism, traditions were still fresh from St. Athanasius the Athonite, who was distinguished by great compassion for his fellow men. He reposed in the year 1000. On Mt. Athos, St. Anthony was able to witness the external types of monastic asceticism, in both the coenobitic and eremitical life of the monks. As for the internal state of the monasticism of that time, it was of paramount significance, for it served to amend all of the particular and general shortcomings of the period. Professor I. Sokolov, commenting on the significance of Byzantine monasticism, says that by their lives monastics set an *example* of what the life of a Christian should be like in order to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. In addition, all the strata of society turned to them for *instruction*. Monks came forward as fearless *exposers of untruth*. Thus, Emperor Michael III, as he was out walking, was accused of cruelty and heartlessness by a certain monk in the crowd. People rallied around the monk to save him from the Emperor's wrath. Another instance speaks of the opposite effect: St. Basil the New (†952) accused Romanus I Lecapenus, the co-emperor of Constantine Porphyrogenitos (920-944), of greed for money and a dissolute life. This Emperor promised to reform, and rewarded St. Basil with gifts for having exposed him. Romanus would arrange for the reading of spiritual books during his meals; he listened with a contrite heart and shed tears. He ordered that monks and hermits be paid a certain sum of money once a year. There

11. Archimandrite Cyprian, *Anthropology of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 26.

were countless instances when monks exposed vice and *interceded* for the oppressed.

Another cause pursued by monastics was the *defense of dogmas, canons* and church resolutions, which they considered binding for both rulers and ordinary citizens. Monastics were also responsible for *missionary* activity. Thus, St. Nicon brought back to Christ many people who had spent a certain time under the Moslems and thus were out of touch with their religion. His successful preaching on repentance earned him the name of the Lord's angel and apostle. Sts. Cyril and Methodius became well known as enlighteners of the Slavs. Georgian monks on Mt. Athos translated the Holy Scriptures, service books and many precious manuscripts into their native language, and thus brought enlightenment to Georgia. Monasticism performed a great service by establishing all kinds of schools, from elementary ones to theological academies. Monastics established libraries and engaged in the copying of tens of thousands of essential holy books for the use of the people, as well as precious manuscripts, with which they supplied other book depositories throughout the Byzantine Empire. Among all their other tasks, the monks found time for scholarly pursuits as well. As for *charity*, monastics manifested it in countless ways. They built orphanages, refuges for the poor, hostels and hospitals. The hospital at the Monastery of the Pantocrator, founded by Emperor John Comnenos, was particularly well equipped with a large number of medical personnel and had various departments taking care of a variety of diseases.

However, the foremost task of monastics was their intercession through *prayer,* which effected the salvation of individuals or of states in calamitous predicaments. There were innumerable instances of healing the sick, which strengthened faith. And lastly, from among monastics came the highest Church hierarchy.[12]

Such, then, was the spirit of Eastern monasticism at the time of St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves. He became imbued with it during his journeys, adopted it and subsequently passed it on to his faithful disciple St. Theodosius, who fulfilled the precepts of his elder by establishing a coenobitic monastery and serving the world in the spirit of evangelical love St. Anthony himself, however, renouncing the world, gave himself over to the highest contemplative *podvig* and ended his life in reclusion.

St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves (†1073)[13] was born in Lyubech of the Chernigov Province. Neither his family, his social status, nor his secular name are

12. I. Sokolov, *The State of Monasticism in the Byzantine Church* (Kazan, 1894), pp. 495-536.

13. Commemorated July 10. The source of information about him is the Chronicles of 1051 and 1074.

known. He was tonsured on Mt. Athos. The words of St. Nestor the Chronicler, "Anthony of the Kiev Caves was glorified like Anthony of Egypt," are especially true, because it fell to St. Anthony's lot to become the father of Russian monasticism. Upon his return from Greece, St. Anthony visited all the monasteries in Kiev, but "did not like" to remain in any of them, "as was pleasing to God."[14] For his ascetic labors he chose a cave which had been dug by Metropolitan Hilarion for the purpose of solitary prayer when he had been a priest in the village of Berestovo, and which had stood empty from the time of his appointment to the Kiev Metropoly in 1051. This cave was in a dense forest. When St. Anthony moved into the cave "he began living there, praying to God, eating dry bread only every second day, and drinking a moderate amount of water; he continued digging the cave, working day and night, keeping vigil and praying."[15] At the time of Prince Yaroslav's death (1054), St. Anthony was already renowned as an ascetic; and Prince Izyaslav would come to him with his warriors to receive a blessing. Around that time, a brotherhood of twelve men formed around St. Anthony. Among them were also "Nicon the Presbyter," who tonsured the brethren (St. Anthony himself, like St. Anthony of Egypt, did not hold any priestly rank), Barlaam, Ephraim the Eunuch, who later brought the Studite Rule from Constantinople and subsequently became the bishop of Pereyaslav, and finally St. Theodosius, the future creator of the monastery.

It was in St. Theodosius' time that the brethren dug out "a large cave" and built a church and cells within it. When that was accomplished, St. Anthony blessed the newly established monastery and went away to dig another cave for himself on the hill above the river. Professor Golubinsky thinks that St. Anthony lived there for another fourteen years. But "despite his strict seclusion, St. Anthony did not shun people. Monks and laymen came to seek his counsel in important matters, and he gave them his blessing. At times he would tend sick people, offering them of his meager fare instead of medicine, and thus healing them through his prayers."[16] When Prince Izyaslav sent Abbot Barlaam to supervise another monastery, St. Anthony made St. Theodosius the abbot of the Kiev Caves; thus he directed the monastery without concerning himself with its administration. Examples of such spiritual organization of monasteries can be found in the East. For instance, in the 6th century, in the monastery of Abba Seridos, there were the Elders John the Prophet and Barsanuphius the Great. Their counsel and blessing were sought in all important matters of the monastery's life. When Abba Seridos entrusted the young novice Dositheus to Abba

14. Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. I, ch. 6, p. 572.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 573.
16. Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II, p. 73.

Dorotheus, and the latter did not dare to become his guide, the Elders were asked to help solve the problem. Their answer was that it was God's will to save Dositheus through Abba Dorotheus. These Elders were direct heralds of God's will. In the monastery of the Kiev Caves, St. Anthony was such a herald of God's will, and the monks turned to him with their problems. Due to contacts with the East, Russia's spiritual life was in certain respects a reflection of the spiritual life of the East, and the well-established Eastern tradition of eldership was passed on to Russia as well.[17]

3. ST. THEODOSIUS OF THE KIEV CAVES[18]
(born 1035-38, died 1074)

The significance of St. Anthony in no way diminished the significance of St. Theodosius, his disciple, his co-ascetic, and the sharer of his monastic mystery (*sotainnik*), whose merits in the eyes of the Church and great personality equalled those of St. Anthony. As an elder he received revelations of thoughts from his spiritual children and guided them, and he was endowed with the gifts of grace (charismas). St. Theodosius was the second Russian elder. According to Professor Smirnov, "the fathers of Russian monasticism, Sts. Anthony and Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, represented different types of asceticism: the first, tonsured on Mt. Athos, was a contemplative hermit, while the second, tonsured by St. Anthony, combined contemplative and severe asceticism with an outstanding practical and organizational talent. The time of St. Theodosius' abbacy in the Kiev Caves Monastery (1062-1074) was undoubtedly the best in the history of this monastery, as well as in the history of early Russian monasticism. The monastics who followed (before St. Sergius of Radonezh) imitated St. Theodosius, but could attain neither the heights of his ascetic feats, nor the extent of his glory. It was unthinkable to try to reorganize Russian monasticism, to give it a new direction more perfect or exalted than the one initiated by Theodosius, or to set tasks which had not been indicated by him. St. Theodosius was the one who *set the precedents for Russian monasticism.*

17. Professor Fedotov says: "The ancient Life of St. Anthony, provided it existed, was lost at an early date. However, some (Abramovich) question its existence. We can only guess why the memory of St. Anthony faded so quickly; the reason must have been that 'his solitary asceticism did not attract attention.' " (Fedotov, *The Saints of Ancient Russia*, p. 34.) However, for Professor Ikonnikov, the existence of St. Anthony's Life is *irrefutable*. He says that it was kept in the Kremlin and later destroyed during one of the Moscow fires, after 1568. (Ikonnikov, Vol. I, Kiev, 1915, pp. 163-164.)
18. Commemorated May 3.

"St. Theodosius was a unique person, endowed with strikingly versatile talents, and unusually balanced in the powers and qualities which form a harmonious individual of sanctity. He was a great ascetic aspiring to the highest feat — death for Christ and the truth. He was an unsleeping man of prayer, obedient, meek and humble; zealous but never given to anger. He was endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and prophecy, but at the same time he was a talented and practical administrator, extremely sincere and sympathetic to human sorrows and needs. None of these qualities predominated at the expense of others. St. Theodosius' attitude to the world was characterized by the same wholeness of his personal gifts which marked his activity as an abbot."[19]

Professor Smirnov[20] is of the opinion that the first spiritual father-confessor of the brethren at the Kiev Caves Monastery was St. Theodosius; Golubinsky,[21] however, surmises that it was "Nicon the Presbyter," called the Great. Smirnov is probably correct, because according to the Studite Rule the abbot is also the father-confessor of the brethren. Confession would usually take place during Matins. At the beginning of the fourth ode of the Canon, the Abbot would come out from the choir, take a seat, and receive the confessions of the approaching brethren, instructing everyone as he saw fit. Following the practice of the Studite abbots, St. Theodosius would receive the confessions of laymen as well. St. Nestor the Chronicler speaks of this aspect of St. Theodosius' activity as follows: "When Theodosius was the abbot, tending the flock of monks entrusted to him by God, he cared *not only for monks, but also for the souls of lay people, that they might be saved.*" This ministry to the souls of laymen manifested itself in a variety of ways. First of all, the ascetic considered it the duty of a monastic *to pray for his fellow men in the world*: "To practice vigilance and to pray for the whole world without ceasing." The second duty of monks was to *teach people,* to be their shepherds. They would instruct by exposing the falseness of the world. During the internal dissension in Kiev among the sons of Prince Yaroslav, the brothers Svyatoslav and Vsevolod deposed Izyaslav and installed Svyatoslav as the ruling prince. Abbot Theodosius forbade the mention of the new Prince's name in the church prayers, refused to attend a banquet held in the Prince's honor, and began exposing the offender. In a letter to Svyatoslav, he likened the Prince to ancient persecutors, and his acts to Cain's fratricide. The humble Abbot aroused the Prince's wrath. The brethren implored Theodosius to desist from exposing the Prince; the boyars came to the monastery and warned

19. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1903), p. 5.
20. Smirnov, *Ancient Russian Spiritual Father-Confessors*, p. 22.
21. Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, p. 573.

the Abbot that the Prince would exile or imprison him. St. Theodosius, however, remained unmoved by these threats; on the contrary, he became even more zealous in exposing Svyatoslav. When the Prince himself finally came to see St. Theodosius, the latter explained: "What success can our wrath have, my good lord, against your power? But we ought to admonish and speak that which is good for the salvation of souls, and you ought to hearken." The ascetic considered it his monastic duty ("we ought to") to expose a falsehood and defend a trampled truth. His *obligations* to lay people were of a more complex and purely pastoral nature. Thus, St. Theodosius was their spiritual father as well. Knowing the devout life of the brethren at the Kiev Caves Monastery, princes, boyars and their families "would flock to the great Theodosius and confess their sins before him." "Spiritual fathers or father-confessors were in those ancient times especially chosen and appointed. This meant that a father-confessor would take upon his own soul the salvation of his spiritual children, and would instruct and guide them along their path to salvation in every step of their religious life, that is, he would become almost their *elder.*"[22] St. Theodosius was such a spiritual father, endowed with a special charisma; he was an *elder* in the true sense of the word.

"The third type of service to the world practiced by the father of Russian monasticism was *intercession* or defense (of people suffering injustice): 'Our father Theodosius was an *intercessor for many before judges and princes, rescuing people*, for it was impossible to disobey him whom they knew to be just and holy. He was respected, not for fine clothes or rich estates, but for his radiant life and purity of spirit, and for his teachings which were fired with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.' It is obvious that the holy Abbot of the Kiev Monastery habitually interceded for the wronged, and that this was an essential part of his great pastoral influence amongst the lay people. The fourth type of his service to the world was *charity*. 'For such was the merciful compassion of our great father Theodosius, that seeing a beggar or a miserable man in sorrow or poorly clothed, he was greatly saddened, wept for him, and was merciful to him.'

"Near the monastery walls St. Theodosius built a house with a church, and in this hospice the monks cared for the beggars, the cripples and the sick; one tenth of the monastery's income was spent on this charity. But even this was not enough for the charitable St. Theodosius. He was renowned as a protector of widows, orphans and disadvantaged wretches; he instructed and consoled everyone who came to him and 'gave them whatever they needed and food.'

"St. Theodosius' activity should not be regarded as that of an individual monastic. He was the father of Russian monasticism, acknowledged as such by

22. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 6.

the most ancient monks. They speak of him as 'the Abbot or Archimandrite of all Russia,' 'the director of the monastics in Russia,' 'the first Superior of coenobitic monasticism in Russia.' Assigning such a position to him, the monks must have seen (and, indeed, did see) in his person a *compulsory example* to be followed, and in his activity a compulsory program of service to the world."[23]

These, then, were the features and qualities by which Professor Smirnov characterized St. Theodosius and his ministry to the world. As we see, they are exactly the same features and qualities which, according to Professor Sokolov, characterized Byzantine monasticism in the time of St. Theodosius.

4. KIEV CAVES PATERICON

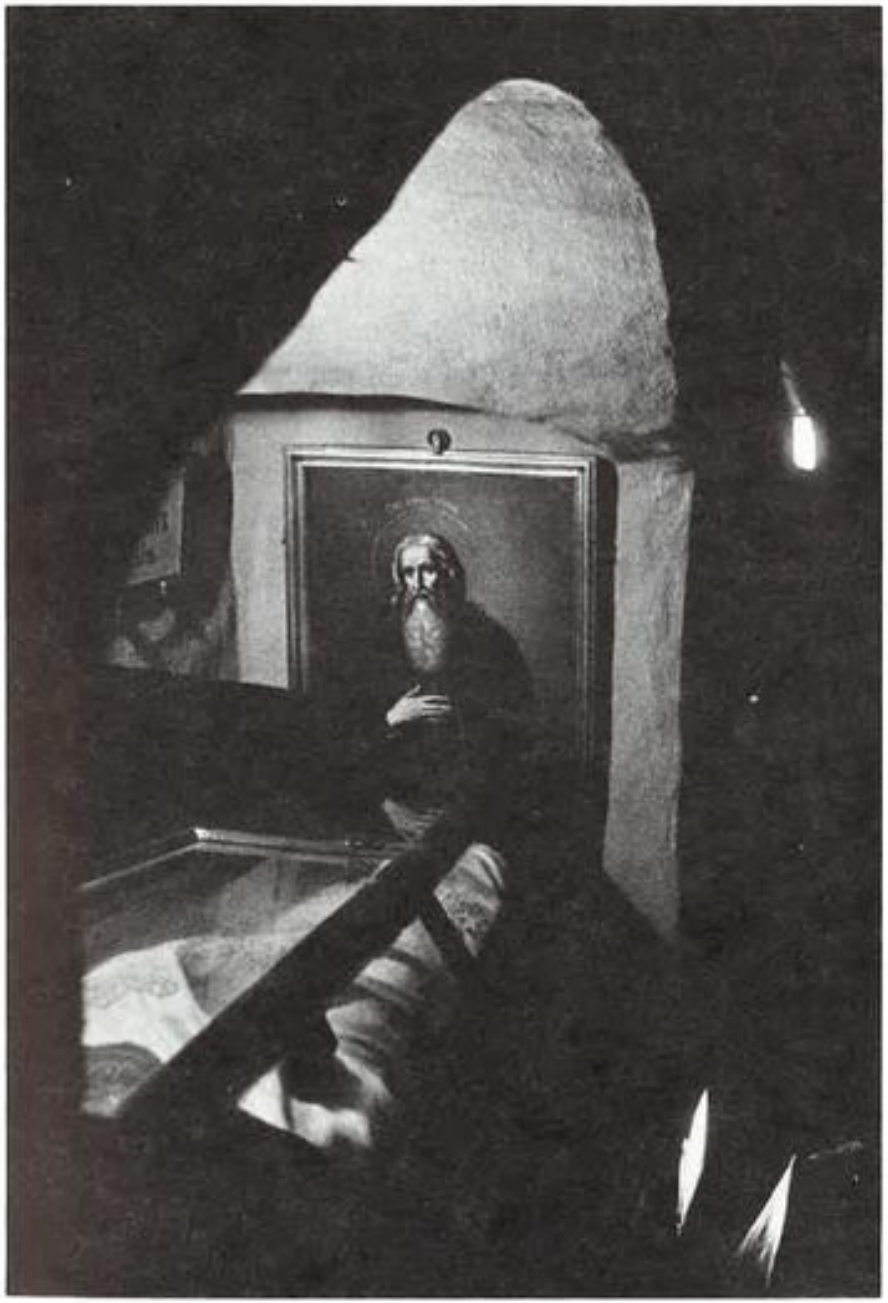
In the Monastery of the Kiev Caves, in the caves of Sts. Anthony and Theodosius there repose the relics of 118 monk-saints: the rich crop of the eldership of these Saints. They were all canonized by Metropolitan Peter Mogila in 1643. However, only the Lives of thirty of them have been recorded in the Kievan Patericon, and they all lived in the 11th, 12th, 13th and even 14th centuries.

We will mention only a few of them. **St. Onesiphorus the Clairvoyant,** Presbyter (†1148) was vouchsafed clairvoyance from God so that he might see people's sins and counsel sinners. His Life tells us of the following incident: The Lord did not reveal to him the sins of one of his spiritual sons, a monk, whose confession lacked sincerity. When the monk died, his body began emitting an unusual stench. St. Anthony appeared to St. Onesiphorus and reproached him for burying this unrepentant sinner in a holy place. St. Onesiphorus began praying to God and imploring Him: "O Lord, why didst Thou hide from me this man's transgressions?" The Angel of the Lord answered: "This was done for the edification of all who sin and do not repent, that upon seeing this they might repent." The next night St. Onesiphorus was told in a vision to take the body of the unrepentant sinner out of the cave and drown it. When St. Onesiphorus and Abbot Pimen were about to execute the will of God, St. Anthony appeared to them and announced that God in His mercy had forgiven the sinner.

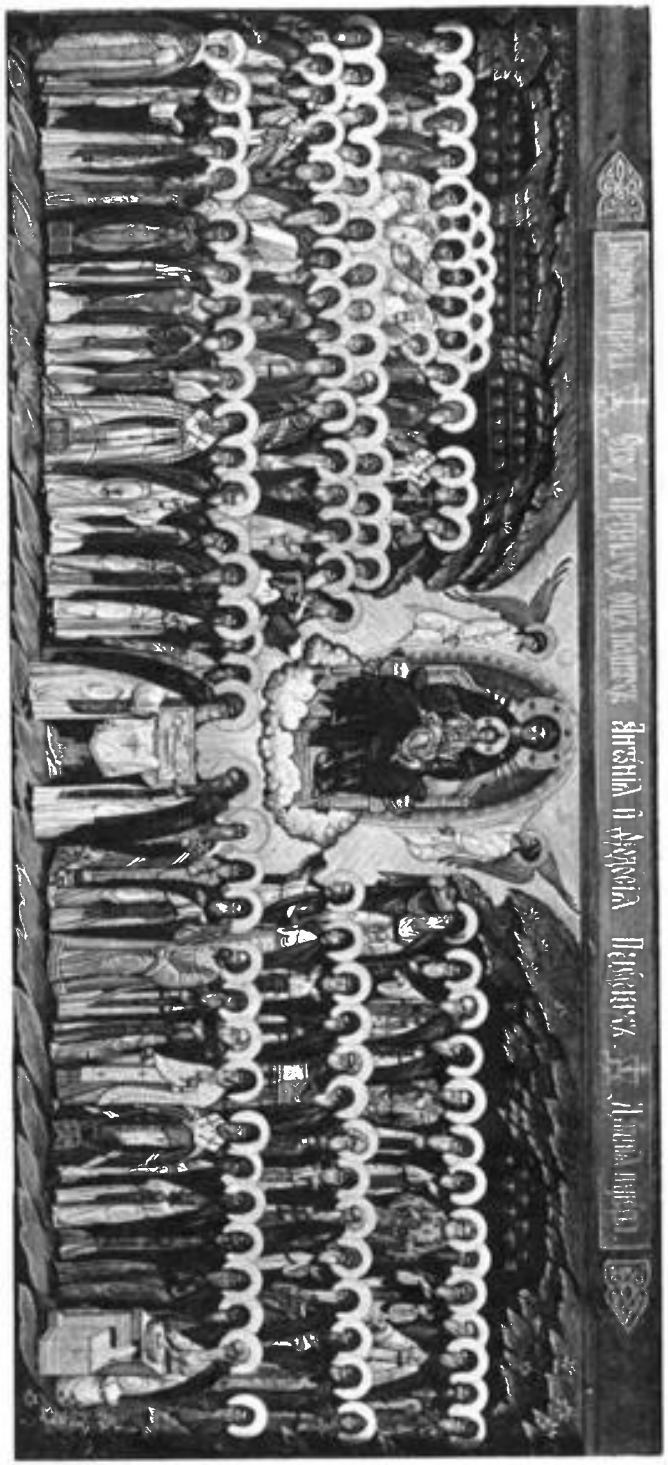
This incident shows that the principles of eldership which formed the basis of the monastery were still alive in subsequent centuries.

Almost all the revered and canonized saints of the 12th and 13th centuries were from the Kiev Caves Monastery. The monastery gradually branched out to the North. Thus, **St. Nicetas, Bishop of Novgorod** (†1108),[24] formerly an

23. *Ibid.*
24. Commemorated January 31 and May 14.



A VAULT OF THE ANCIENT KIEV CAVES
as it looks today, with the reliquary and icon of St. Agapitus the Healer.
Photograph courtesy of Lynne Ryder.



THE SAINTS OF THE GREAT KIEV CAVES LAVRA

An icon painted on the lid of a reliquary of the Kiev Cave Saints in Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York, by Archimandrite Cyprian P.

ascetic of the Kiev Caves (in his youth he was deceived by an appearance of the devil in the form of Christ), became renowned for the miracles he worked as a bishop. **St. Kuksha** (†1113),[25] also an ascetic of the Kiev Caves, became the apostle of Vyatichy and died a martyr's death.

It is impossible to cover in our work all the saints of the Kiev Caves Lavra and the Lavra's significance in the history of the Church. Besides the Kievan ascetics of the 12th century, we should also name **St. Anthony the Roman** (†1147)[26] and **St. Gerasimus of Vologda** (†1178).[27] The latter was born in Kiev and began his ascetic labors in Glinsk Monastery "under the guidance of Glinsk elders experienced in spiritual life." At the age of thirty, drawn to solitary ascetic endeavors, St. Gerasimus departed to the far North. On August 19, 1147, he arrived in Vologda. At that time it was a small settlement with a church dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ. At first he met with enmity, but little by little his ascetic life began to attract people: "Some wished to help the holy man in building a church and a monastery; others wished to practice asceticism under his guidance (as an elder) and share the monastic life with him."

One of the luminaries of the 12th century was **St. Cyril, Bishop of Turov** (1130-1180);[28] he was an ecclesiastical writer, ascetic and stylite. We will quote from a work of St. Cyril in which he teaches the necessity of cutting off one's own will and being in obedience to one's elder: "You are like a candle," he told a monk. "You follow your own will before entering the church doors, but after that it is not for you to decide what is done to you. You are like a garment which minds its own business before it is picked up, and after that you have no say, even if you should be torn to shreds. You act according to your own will before you enter a monastery. When you become a monk, you give yourself wholly to obedience; do not harbor even a drop of your self-will in your heart, that you may not die in your soul. When you join a monastery, try to find a man imbued with the spirit of Christ, adorned with virtues, whose life is a witness of his faith, who loves the Lord above everything else, who is obedient to the abbot and meek with the brethren, who knows the Scriptures, and who, because of all this, knows how to guide those who choose the path to heaven and to God. *Entrust yourself to such a man, renouncing your own will.*" In the Life of St. Cyril one reads: "St. Cyril himself was such a man of ascetic accomplishment (an elder)."

In the 13th century Russia was laid waste by the Mongol invasion; and in 1240 the Kiev Caves Lavra suffered along with the rest of Kiev. The general

25. Commemorated August 27.
26. Commemorated August 3.
27. Commemorated March 4.
28. Commemorated April 28.

calamity was reflected also in the life of the Church. Monastic life came to a standstill, to come to life again during subsequent centuries. However, we should mention two outstanding men of the 13th century: St. Abramius of Smolensk and St. Barlaam of Khutyn.

The Life of **St. Abramius of Smolensk** († c. 1220),[29] compiled by his disciple Ephraim, has been preserved in copies from the 16th and 17th centuries. The author, who must have lived in the 12th or the beginning of the 13th century, gives us a lively account of the contents, extent and trend of education at that time in the rather remote northwest, in Smolensk, where, according to some data, there was a well-established school founded by the great-grandson of Vladimir Monomakh, Roman Rostislavich (1160-1181).

The second Russian Metropolitan, Clement Smolyatich, came also from Smolensk. St. Nestor the Chronicler refers to him as "a scholar and philosopher, such as the Russian land had not known before, who wrote about Homer, Aristotle and Plato." Metropolitan Clement was the author of an exegetical epistle to the Presbyter Thomas. This is a collection of interpretations of some obscure passages in the Bible and patristic writings. It is clear from this epistle that in Smolensk there existed a group of individuals dedicated to scholarly pursuits, who defended different exegetical points of view. It follows from the above that St. Abramius' scholarship was not a unique phenomenon.

Having connected this information with other data relating to that period, one may form an opinion about the high level of spiritual and theological education in Russia during the earliest period of its ecclesiastical history. St. Abramius' great erudition in patristic literature, his experience and wisdom, enabled him to become the teacher of the majority of city-dwellers. Envy and ill will on the part of the local clergy resulted in slander. (St. Abramius was accused of indulging in the books of the Bogomil sect.) He was acquitted, however, and the evidence of his innocence was confirmed by providential intervention: in response to his prayer a drought was broken by abundant rainfall. Bishop Ignatius appointed him Superior of a new monastery dedicated to the Placing of the Honorable Robe of the Most Holy Theotokos at Blachernae, in which monastery St. Abramius was free to continue serving as an elder, receiving both rich and poor.

St. Barlaam of Khutyn (†1192)[30] came from a rich family. He settled in Khutyn to live the life of an anchorite, having arrived there with a few other friends who were boyars. He received the tonsure and the rank of priest. He conducted inner warfare, endured the malice of his visible and invisible enemies, and attained the state of dispassion. Then he began receiving visitors, instructing and healing them (as an elder), and even resurrected a dead person. Shortly before the Saint's death, his friend Dobrynya Adreikovich (Anthony in monasticism) returned from Constantinople and subsequently became Archbishop of Novgorod and Pskov. St. Barlaam is commemorated on February 10, together with other hierarchs buried on the "golden porch" of the Cathedral of St. Sophia. We mentioned his journeys earlier in the present work.

29. Commemorated August 21.
30. Commemorated November 6.

A general view of the Kiev Caves Lavra today.

THE HOLY HIERARCHS OF MOSCOW
with an icon of the Vladimir Mother of God.

Left to right: Patriarch Tikhon, Metropolitans Peter, Philip, Hermogenes, Alexius and Jonah. *A contemporary icon by Archimandrite Cyprian P.*

Chapter Two

MUSCOVITE RUSSIA

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE 14TH CENTURY

"WITH THE BEGINNING of the 14th century there is to be observed in Russia a manifestation which is to be explained by the historical circumstances of Mongol times, a manifestation unknown in the local conditions of the East. It has become accepted to call this *monastic colonization*. Going away from people into the inaccessible forest depths, which in the ancient Russian language were called 'deserts,' a hermit for a long time labors alone, being visited only by wild beasts. No sooner does news of him go out among the people and the fame of him become known, than there begin to gather about the small cell of the hesychast in the forest desert his future co-dwellers and fellow ascetics, one after the other. With axe and shovel they labor with their own hands, adding labor to labor, chopping trees, sowing fields, building cells and a church. A monastery grows up. And to the murmuring of the age-old forest, to the wild howling and growling of wolves and bears, there is now joined a new sound — to be sure, at first a weak one — a resounding voice; and as it were to the call of the new voice, to the welcome sounding of the monastery semantron, peasants appear at the monastery. They ceaselessly chop down the forests, lay out roads into the thickets which were previously inaccessible, build settlements and villages near the monastery. . . . . The villages grow and turn into towns or even cities. . . . This movement was inspired by the greatest ascetic of the Russian land, the father of

subsequent monasticism, St. Sergius of Radonezh, who, in the expression of his biographer, was 'abbot of a multitude of brethren and father of many monasteries,' and according to the Chronicler, 'founder and teacher of all the monasteries which are in Russia.' "[1]

What was the life of the desert-dweller when he lived "alone in solitude" in the bosom of virginal nature? Anchorites sought out places which might inspire in the soul an elevated feeling, a feeling of God's presence. The place of the second hermitage of Siya (where St. Anthony of Siya labored) "was in the mountains and was surrounded by mountains as by walls; and in the valley between those mountains was a lake, which was called Padoun. In these mountains a great forest was to be seen, and at the base of these mountains stood the cell of the Saint. Around it were twelve birch trees, as white as snow. Most melancholy was this place, so that one coming to see this wilderness would have great contrition, for the very sight of the place could bring the beholder of it into tender feeling."

Yet the very wilderness which moved and exalted the soul was at the same time a threatening power, full of every possible danger. The same St. Anthony of Siya, in the words of his biographer, "went into the northern lands which lie in the region of the Dvina, passing through the impenetrable forests, gorges and swamps which lie near the White Sea, and the mossy places and inconstant marshes, and the many lakes, seeking a suitable place, wherever God might instruct him to stay." In these mossy places and swamps "wild beasts dwelled, bears and wolves, deer and hares and foxes, a great multitude of them, which were like herds." However, he lived in harmony in their midst, as did other ascetics who had attained dispassion. "When St. Sergius settled in the forest of Radonezh," in the words of his biographer, "the desert was impenetrable; there were no trails, and it was untrodden by the foot of man. Many beasts and creeping serpents then appeared to him; diverse beasts came in multitudes to his cell not only at night, but even during the day; wolves began to dig and howl around his cell, and sometimes bears appeared, drew near to him, and surrounded him without doing any harm." St. Macarius of Kolyazin, again, "had the custom of going about the desert places; and if there were wild beasts inhabiting a wilderness, they would walk with him like the meekest sheep; and what is more, they submitted to him and many times took food from him." The northern climate was likewise severe and merciless to defenseless human nature. In the Life of St. Anthony of Siya it is said that during the winter from great storms the anchorite's cell would be covered with snow, and he "lived under the snow as in a

1. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 24.

cave, and sent up to God his fervent prayers with warm tears."[2] From where did the saints obtain this power, thanks to which they could conquer the laws of nature? How, for example, could St. Paul of Obnora live in the hollow of a linden tree for three years? In his Life it is said: "He was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit." In these words we may find the answer also to such a supernatural life of the Saint.

We know the ferocity of the Russian forests; and the fact that he lived in the hollow of a linden tree shows that the anchorite managed without fire. Such a life surpasses human power, since anyone would have to die in the first severe freeze.

This phenomenon is explained by St. Seraphim of Sarov in his Conversation with Motovilov on the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit. After the grace of God had shone upon them in visible fashion at the prayer of the Saint, the latter said to Motovilov: "No pleasantness of earthly fragrance can be compared with the fragrance which we now smell, for we are now surrounded by the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. Notice, Your God-love, how you told me that around us it is as warm as a bath; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor above us either. Therefore, this warmth is not in the air, but in ourselves. This is that very warmth of which the Holy Spirit, in the words of the prayer, causes us to cry out to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit.' Being warmed by it, men and women desert-dwellers did not fear the winter frost, being clothed as in warm fur coats in a garment of grace woven by the Holy Spirit." These words refer to the Russian ascetics. But in the Egyptian desert the picture was different and the nature of the manifestation of help from Above was different also.

In the Life of St. Onuphrius[3] there is a description of the journey of St. Paphnutius in "the inner desert, where an anchorite lived in the midst of sand dunes under a blazing sun." This is one of a series of supernatural lives. These anchorites, as also later Russian anchorites, following their example, for the sake of God renounced everything that belongs to human nature, all the way to the instinct of self-preservation, and threw themselves into the abyss of God's mercy unconditionally, preserving only the faith which moves mountains. And this faith, in both Russia and Egypt, proved to be justified. But in Russia anchorites were saved from frost by the warmth of the Holy Spirit, whereas in Egypt, in the midst of a barren desert, springs suddenly gushed forth, and palms grew up with branches bearing fruit every month. St. Onuphrius said to St. Paphnutius

2. "Ancient Deserts in Northeastern Russia," in *Orthodox Converser*, Vol. III (Kazan, 1860), pp. 196-221.

3. †4th century, commemorated June 12.

about those like himself: "God sends to us holy angels," who offer food to them, bring water out of the rocks, and strengthen them to such an extent that in them are fulfilled the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who said: *They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall take wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary* (Is. 40:31). To the question of St. Paphnutius as to how he received Communion, St. Onuphrius replied as follows: "An Angel of the Lord comes to me, bringing with him the Most Pure Mysteries of Christ, and gives me Holy Communion. And not to me only does the Angel come with Divine Communion, but also to the other ascetics who live for the sake of God in the desert and do not see the face of man, and in giving Communion he fills their hearts with unutterable rejoicing; and if someone desires to see a man, an Angel takes him and raises him into the heavens so that he might see the Saints and rejoice. And the soul of such a desert-dweller shines like the light and rejoices in spirit, having been vouchsafed to see heavenly good things. And then the desert-dweller forgets about all his labors undertaken in the desert. And when the desert-dweller returns to his place he begins all the more fervently to serve the Lord, hoping to receive in the heavens that which he was vouchsafed to see."

That which was in the fourth century in the Egyptian desert was repeated in the Russian desert, in the Sarov forests even of the 19th century.

"Once when reading the words of the Savior," says St. Seraphim of Sarov to John Tikhonov, "that *in My Father's house there are many mansions*, I the wretched one stopped in thought upon them and desired to see these heavenly dwellings. . . . And the Lord, in actual fact, in His great mercy did not deprive me of consolation according to my faith, and showed me these eternal abodes, in which I, a poor earthly wanderer, being raised up to there in a moment, saw the unutterable heavenly beauty and those who live there: the Great Forerunner and Baptizer of the Lord, John, the Apostles, Hierarchs, Martyrs and our monastic Fathers, Anthony the Great, Paul of Thebes, Sabbas the Sanctified, Onuphrius the Great and Mark of Thrace, and all the Saints shining in unutterable glory and joy such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered the thought of man, but such as God has prepared for those that love Him."[4]

St. Seraphim is separated from St. Onuphrius by fifteen centuries, but the mystical phenomena are one and the same. St. Seraphim is almost our contemporary: some of us have known those who have personally seen him. This is not some mysterious remote antiquity in the mist of the ages. But it is precisely now, when our spiritual wings have become atrophied and we have forgotten what possibilities are concealed in our spirit, that St. Seraphim was sent to us, in

4. V. I. Ilyin, *St. Seraphim of Sarov* (Paris, 1925), p.125.

all the power and spiritual might of the ancient Fathers, so that we might remember our divine sonship and strive towards the limitless prefection of our Heavenly Father: *Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. 5:46).

St. Seraphim himself thus understood his mission: in the just-cited conversation with Motovilov, in conclusion he said the following: "I think that the Lord will help you always to keep this [action of grace] in your memory . . . all the more in that it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you to the whole world, so that you yourself might be confirmed in the work of God and might be useful to others."[5]

To all that has been said, one may yet add the following: the dominating characteristic of the northeastern ascetics is *love*. "Having acquired love for God and neighbor, thou didst fulfill the chief part of the Law and the Prophets; for he who does not love his neighbor cannot love God. But thou, O holy Father Paul, didst fulfill both" (sixth ode of the Canon to St. Paul of Obnora).

St. Seraphim was also distinguished by such an exceptional love; all who came to him he called "my joy." This resemblance is not accidental and is not a simple coincidence. Although the two ascetics lived in different times and are separated by four hundred years, they are made kin by the fact that both of them went by experience through the same path, the same school of the Holy Fathers, and were crowned with the same crown of virtue -- perfect love.

The explanation of this mystery (the attainment of true love) is given us by St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century): "There is no means of arousing in the soul Divine Love, in pursuit of which you mystically run to anchoretism, if the soul has not overcome the passions. But you have said that your soul, not having overcome the passions, has loved the love of God, and in this there is no order. . . . Everyone says that he desires to love God, and not only Christians say this, but even those who incorrectly worship God. And this word is pronounced by everyone as his own; but in the pronunciation of such words the tongue only moves, while the soul does not feel what is said." First one must heal the soul: "As a sick man does not say to his father: 'make me king,' but first takes care of his infirmity, and after his complete recovery the kingdom of the father by itself becomes his kingdom; so also the sinner, offering repentance and receiving the health of his soul, enters with the Father into the realm of pure being and reigns in the glory of his Father."

The gift of love is possessed by all true ascetics and hesychasts who have uprooted the passions. Of such ascetics St. Isaac the Syrian says that if anyone has no opportunity to manifest love of his neighbor in an active way by reason

5. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

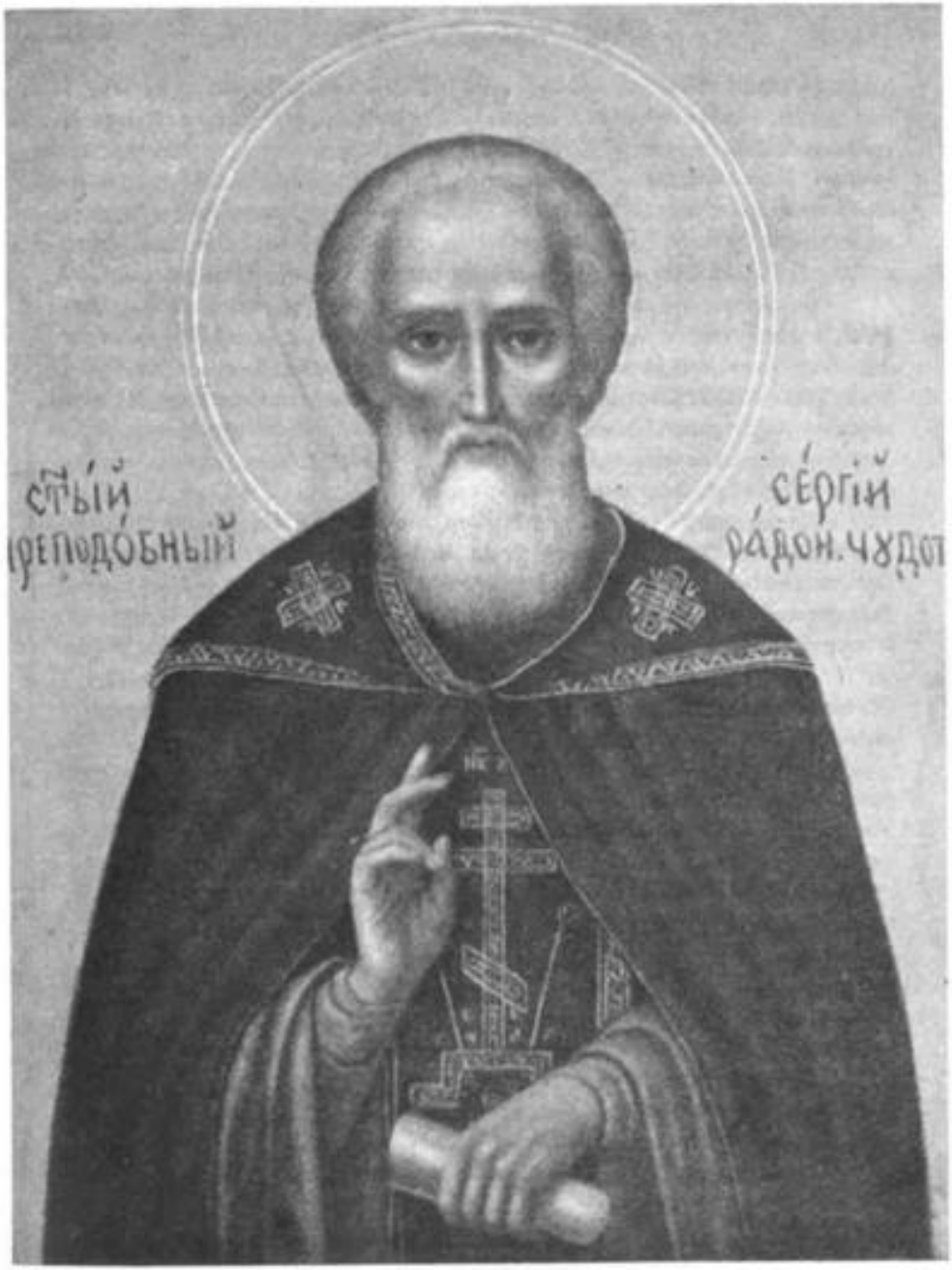
of his life of silence and his constant remaining in seclusion, then it is sufficient before God to limit oneself to mental love (prayerful intercession). "For if one has no communication at all with men and is entirely immersed in thought in God, when he is dead to everything and remote from everyone — such a one is not commanded to serve men and please them. And if one from time to time interrupts his labor and, after the fulfilling of his rule, meets with men and is consoled by communion with them, but is negligent over his brethren who are in sorrows, he is unmerciful and cruel. He fails to condescend to participate in works of love because of an insufficiency of mercy, because of self-esteem and false thoughts. He who disdains the sick will not see the light. He who turns his face away from a sorrowing one — his day is darkened. And he who disdains the voice of a sufferer, his sons in darkness will seek out their houses by groping. Let us not mock the great name of silence by our ignorance. For to every kind of life there is its proper time and place and distinguishing characteristic."[6]

In this citation St. Isaac the Syrian speaks of the two sides of the Christian religious ideal, namely, active mercy and contemplative anchoretism which flees communication with men. ("I cannot be with God and men" — Abba Arsenius.) Professor Archpriest Georges Florovsky points to the difference of opinion and even contradiction which exists in ascetical literature on this subject, and which contains the greatest antinomy unresolved by philosophy. This often gave rise to serious theological and dogmatical problems.[7] Professor Zarin has investigated in detail these "two paths," showing their equal value and even the *duo-unity* of the religious ideal, which includes both its contemplative and active sides. The aim of this ideal is to raise up and bring into reality love for God and for one's neighbor, for the sake of God, *inseparably* but also *without confusion*.[8] From the words of St. Isaac already cited one may see in what way this aim must be realized in practice in the very life of the ascetics.

2. THE GREAT PATRON OF THE RUSSIAN LAND ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH (1314-1392)[9]

St. Sergius, baptized with the name Bartholomew, was the second son of Cyril and Mary, boyars of Rostov. The young Bartholomew had difficulties in

6. St. Isaac the Syrian, *Works*, Homily 55, pp. 252-259.
7. Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the 5th to 8th Centuries* (Paris, 1933), p. 145.
8. Zarin, Vol. I, Book 1, p. 107.
9. Commemorated July 5 and September 25.



ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

An icon painted for the Kontzevitches by Orlova and published by the author himself.

learning to read and write, and he prayed to God for help. Through a miraculous manifestation he was granted literacy. Just as God's chosen people received everything directly from God, so this God-chosen youth received everything directly from God's hand. After his parents' death, he left his home and settled in the forest wilderness, where in time he established a monastery. Being congenial with the ancient ascetics, inwardly akin to them, he followed the classical path of asceticism, which leads through external labors towards exalted spiritual states.

St. Sergius was the chief inspirer and planter in Russia of contemplative life. The Holy Trinity Monastery [which he founded] produced fifty monasteries, which in their turn produced forty more. Hieromonk Nicon, in his Life of St. Sergius [of 1891], names one hundred monk-saints who came from the monastery of St. Sergius. This was a spiritual school which produced a blossoming of contemplative labor in the whole northeastern part of Russia. Let us now consider the Saint's Life from this point of view.

Having buried their parents, Bartholomew and his widowed brother Stephen left for the impenetrable forest. Here they built for themselves a primitive hut and a small church of logs. Then they asked the blessing of Metropolitan Theognostus to consecrate the church, dedicating it to the Holy Trinity. The Metropolitan sent a priest for this purpose, *antimens* and whatever was needed for the church. Stephen could not endure the hardships of anchoretic life and left for Moscow, where he settled in the Theophany Monastery. Bartholomew remained alone.

Ascetical writings state that not all ascetics are destined to be hesychasts, but only those called to this by the grace of God. Such ascetics are given ineffable consolations which support them in conditions of super-human hardship. In order to enter this path and follow it without intolerable discomfort, one should attain to dispassion beforehand. How did the young Bartholomew attain this exalted state while living with his parents at home? Did he read patristic works? Ascetical literature existed in Russia from early years.[10] Or did he hear about the teaching of the Holy Fathers from others? One can only guess. However, one thing is certain: St. Sergius belonged to those integral natures chosen by God, who entirely strive towards God with their whole being from the very start of their conscious life. To them who have preserved their purity of heart unsullied from childhood, spiritual paths are revealed directly. However, an acquaintance with ascetical literature or with ascetics who had attained a certain degree of perfection could have further enriched and imparted wisdom to the grace-endowed

10. In the Life of St. Sergius, Epiphanius the Wise cites from *The Ladder* also.

youth. Thus he lived the life of an anchorite in complete isolation and silence, enduring all the hardships accompanying his endeavors. An ordinary person in his position might have impaired his mind or perished from wild beasts, but most likely would have parted with the anchoretic way of life, as did Stephen. But the monk Sergius had begun his monastic life having already attained the state of sanctity, and his subsequent life was a further development and growth of this state. He was "like an eagle who, having spread his light wings, soars high in the air,"[11] as Epiphanius the Wise said.

"After two years, more or less – only God knows how many – thus passed in wilderness and solitude,"[12] writes Epiphanius, monks began gathering around the Saint, and little by little a small community of twelve men was formed. The Saint himself, who by that time was already tonsured with the name of Sergius, was the thirteenth. The community suffered deprivation in everything: there was no food to feed the brethren. "Sometimes there was no wine to perform the Liturgy and no incense to offer to God; often they had no wax to make candles, and they, not having candles, performed the nightly Matins with the light from birch or pine splinters. Using this light, the canonarchs and readers were able to read from books. In this manner they performed their night services."[13] Into what did this pattern of life develop, and what were the communal attitudes in the Holy Trinity Monastery?

Information about this is very scarce, but one may catch a glimpse of some manifestation of eldership. Thus, Professor Smirnov speaks of spiritual guidance at the monastery. In St. Sergius' Monastery, it was at first the Abbot, himself a great ascetic, who received the confession of his brethren. When persuading him to become their abbot, the brethren said: "We wish you to be our abbot and the director of our souls and bodies, so that every day we may receive your forgiveness, your blessing and your prayer, and partake of the Most Pure Mysteries from your venerable hands."[14] Thus the Trinity Brotherhood was choosing in the person of St. Sergius not only their abbot, but a spiritual father as well; and in the beginning he was the father-confessor of all the monks in his charge. In our discussion of St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, we have already pointed out that the ancient Russian spiritual father-confessor, according to Professor Smirnov, was "almost an elder." If, among other things, he was also endowed with spiritual gifts (charisma), as St. Sergius was, his function as an el-

11. Epiphanius the Wise, *The Life of St. Sergius*, p. 37.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
14. Smirnov, *Ancient Russian Spiritual Father-Confessors*, p. 26.

der was obvious. St. Sergius' function as elder, incidentally, is attested by the fact that he would receive revelations of thoughts.[15]

Right from the start, the monastery adopted the Studite Rule,[16] as did the Kiev Caves Monastery at the time of St. Theodosius. According to this Rule, the revelation of thoughts takes place during Matins, at the beginning of the fourth ode of the Canon. The fact that revelation of thoughts was practiced in the Holy Trinity Monastery finds its support in the Life of St. Theodore of Rostov, St. Sergius' nephew. Epiphanius the Wise wrote: "It was amazing that he never concealed his thoughts from the Saint: whether at night or in the day."[17] The same is said in the Life of St. Nicon: "Nicon's devoted heart was always open and ready to confess his thoughts and the movements of his soul before Sergius."

The laudations of Epiphanius the Wise reveal the characteristic features of an elder in St. Sergius: "A true leader and not a false teacher, a good shepherd, unflattering instructor, spiritual guide, kind chastiser, a sure helmsman. . . . " "To the ranks of monastics he was a ladder leading to the heavenly heights. . . . " "Those who were eye-witnesses and servants of that great and holy elder – his disciples and sharers of the monastic mystery, or, better, the obedient ones – have no need of our poor account."

Regarding laymen, Epiphanius says that "all came to him, not only neighbors; they came from afar, from distant cities and countries, wishing to see him and to hear a word from him, and they all received great benefit and salvation for their souls from his edifying deeds. . . . He taught many by his edifying words and made them repent before God. . . . To repentant sinners he was a surety."[18]

St. Sergius was an elder not only for the monks in submission to him, but also for laymen. But something even more astonishing happened: there came to him for a word of instruction contemplative ascetics already wise with the experience of many years, such as St. Sergius of Nurma, who came from Mt. Athos,

15. St. Theodore the Studite, who lived at the time when eldership was particularly flourishing in the East, insisted on the necessity of fighting passions by revealing one's thoughts: "Let no one try to stand on his own, to proceed by himself, and let no one move his feet from the solid rock of faith in his (spiritual) father . . . but unevasively confess and fully reveal his innermost thoughts to him." *The Philokalia (Dobrotolubie)* Vol. IV, (Moscow, 1889), p. 262.

16. In 1381, when coenobitic life was introduced, the Studite Rule was replaced by the Jerusalem Rule. St. Sabbas (of Storozhevsk Monastery) became the spiritual father; he was followed by Epiphanius the Wise.

17. Epiphanius the Wise, *The Life of St. Sergius*, p. 94.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-127.

St. Euthymius of Suzdal, St. Demetrius of Priluki,[19] St. Stephen of Makhra,[20] and others; they are called the "fellow-conversers" of St. Sergius. These fellow-conversers show us the greatness of the spiritual image in which St. Sergius was manifested in the eyes of his contemporaries, being a teacher of teachers and an instructor of instructors. "Can it be that in these distant lands, so shortly before converted to the light of Christ, such a lamp has shone forth, at whom even our ancient Fathers would be astonished?" cried out the Greek bishop who doubted; and for his doubt he was chastised with blindness, and immediately after this he was healed by the Saint himself. And in truth, the spiritual visage of St. Sergius attained an unutterable beauty which might astonish even the ancient Fathers.

There is a miraculous vision of St. Sergius which is well known. He beheld the darkness of night suddenly illumined by a radiant light. Having stepped out on a porch, he beheld a multitude of birds flying above, and he heard a voice: "Sergius, God has heard your prayer; as many birds as you see, by so many will your flock of disciples increase; and after your time they will not grow less if they will desire to follow in your footsteps."

Towards the end of his life, St. Sergius was granted a vision of the Mother of God. This was in 1388, four years before his death. In his Life there is recorded also an instance of the appearance of the Divine Light which St. Gregory Palamas calls "Divine Energies" and "rays of Divinity," and regarding which St. Macarius of Egypt says that "angels and serving spirits partake of the light of this fire."[21] We would also like to tell of the instance when St. Isaac the Silent was terrified at beholding a radiant youth of dazzling appearance co-celebrating with the Saint, while fire descended on the sacred chalice, covering the altar-table, and enveloping the celebrant Sergius himself.

Such miraculous apparitions in the Life of St. Sergius are characteristic of the ascetics of the tradition of the East, who went first through the path of outward labors (*praxis*) and attained, as the fruit of these, divine vision (*theoria*). And as St. Gregory Palamas says, "Being removed from the material, in which he [the ascetic] at first travels on the path known to him . . . he proceeds to the Truth by the unutterable power of the Spirit, and by an unutterable spiritual reception he hears unutterable words and sees the unbeholdable, and already here on earth he is, and becomes, a miracle."[22] One must assume that it was for simi-

19. †1392, commemorated February 11. St. Demetrius founded the first coenobitic monastery on the Vologda River, and thereby opened the way to the inaccessible wilderness for new disciples of the Name of Christ.

20. †1406, commemorated July 14.

21. V. Lossky, *Essai sur la Theologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, pp. 217-218.

22. Archimandrite Cyprian, "Spiritual Predecessors of Gregory Palamas," p. 130.

lar mysteries and depths of the inward ascetical life that the fellow-conversers of St. Sergius came to him and took counsel.

Spiritual attainments, however, are not the lot of the majority, but are accessible only to a few chosen ones. Such was the young monk Cyril, the future founder of the White Lake Monastery. And this is why St. Sergius, when he came to the Simonov Monastery, hastened to go to him in the bread-bakery, where his obedience was, and instructed him for hours, paying no attention to others. And the testament of St. Sergius passed through St. Cyril to the subsequent ascetic tradition of the whole of northeastern Russia, the "Northern Thebaid." Among the various disciples of St. Sergius were two especially clear examples of contemplative ascetic life: Sts. Sylvester and Paul of Obnora (see below). "There has remained," says Professor Smolitch, "from St. Paul's Monastery a remarkable exegetical writing about how to instruct young monks, which provides an understanding of monastic life. Although this writing is in essence dedicated to external ascesis, nevertheless we find in it essential characteristics of inward ascesis as well: there occur concepts such as 'spiritual prayer,' 'concentration of spirit,' and 'silence.' "[23] All these terms serve as signs of the school of Eastern asceticism.

But then arrived a great historic moment in the life of the Russian people: the overthrow of the Tatar yoke. At this terrible , decisive hour the importance of St. Sergius as an elder and the patron of the Russian land was revealed in all its spiritual grandeur. Like Moses of old, he became the leader of his people.

The significance of the Kulikovo Battle, this great event, is described by Professor Kliuchevsky as follows: "The people, accustomed to trembling at the mere mention of the word 'Tatar,' at last plucked up courage and rose against the oppressors. And not only did they find in themselves the courage to rise, but they went out into the open steppes to look for the Tatar hordes and to fall like an invincible wall upon the enemy forces, burying them under the masses of Russian bones. . . and this moral power, this feeling of courage and spiritual strength, was breathed into his contemporaries by St. Sergius."[24] The Chronicle of St. Nicon has preserved for posterity the description of Prince Demetrius Donskoy's visit to St. Sergius before his campaign against the Tatars. In the ensuing conversation with the Grand Prince, the holy Elder first advised him to respect the evil Tatar Mamai with gifts and honor, following the example of St. Basil the Great, whose gifts appeased Julian the Apostate: "You too, my Lord, pay your respects to them, give them gold and silver, and God will not allow

23. Igor Smolitch, *Leben und Lehre der Startzen* (Vienna, 1936), p. 64.
24. Professor Kliuchevsky, *Speech: St. Sergius of Radonezh* (Munich, 1948), p. 40.

them to destroy us: He will elevate you, seeing your humility, and will bring down the pride of the enemy." "All this I have done already," answered Demetrius, "but my enemy becomes even more conceited." Having heard these words, the Saint of God made the sign of the Cross over him and was inspired to pronounce: "Go, my Prince, without fear! The Lord will help you against the godless enemy." Then, lowering his voice, he said for the Prince alone to hear: "You will conquer your enemy."[25]

An artistic description of this campaign is given by Boris Zaitsev: "Whatever Demetrius' disposition was in other situations, here before the battle in the Field of Kulikovo he felt his own irrepressible flight forward, as it were. In those days he was the genius of young Russia. The more senior and experienced commanders suggested that he wait a little. Mamai was strong, he had the support of Lithuania and of Prince Oleg of Ryazan. Contrary to such advice, Demetrius crossed the river Don. The way back was now cut off. Only one way was left: forward, towards victory or death.

"In those days Sergius, too, was highly inspired, and it was just in time that he sent on the message: 'Go, my Prince, go forward; God and the Holy Trinity will help you.'

"September 8, 1380. A gloomy dawn. The river Don and Nepryadva. The Field of Kulikovo and the spirit of *The Lay of Igor*. Once again Russia is going out into the steppe to fight the beast of the steppes. Profound, serious intensity. The warriors pray before the battle. The Saint's message is read to them. The Grand Prince's black banner with the golden image of the Savior. A silvery-cold dawn rises slowly over the autumn mists. The morning is dewy and chill. From beyond the river Nepryadva come distant sounds of groaning or rumbling. Men wash themselves, tighten the saddle-girths, put on clean shirts, and for the last time straighten their weapons. They draw up and go to meet their death. Sadness and fate, inevitability. There is obviously no return. . . . " "The battle began along the huge front, ten miles long. Sergius was right when he said: 'Many martyrs' wreaths are being prepared.' There were weaved not a few.

"In those hours the Saint prayed with his brethren in the monastery church. From time to time he commented on the course of the battle. He named the warriors who had fallen and prayed for the dead. At last he announced: 'The victory is ours.' "[26]

"Time has long since wiped away these deeds from the people's memory, as it has covered deep in the dust of centuries the bones of the Kulikovo warriors,

25. Hieromonk Nicon, *The Life of St. Sergius* (Moscow, 1885), p. 148.
26. Boris Zaitsev, *St. Sergius of Radonezh* (Paris, 1925), pp.73-74.

but the memory of the holy hermit still reigns in peoples' consciousness. . . . Honoring the memory of St. Sergius, we test ourselves, we examine our moral reserve bequeathed to us by the great builders of our moral order. . . . The gates of St. Sergius' Lavra will close, and the vigil lamps over his tomb will die only when we will have spent this reserve to the last."[27]

St. Nicon of Radonezh (†1428)[28] came to St. Sergius in his youth, but after a while for the sake of "holy obedience" he was directed by the Saint to Abbot Athanasius of Vysotsk. St. Sergius was preparing in the person of St. Nicon his own successor. With this objective in mind, he deliberately sent away his best disciple, so that languishing in a "strange place" away from his beloved elder, St. Nicon would learn to understand and appreciate the "fatherly embrace." St. Nicon returned to Holy Trinity Monastery only a few years later, already bearing the rank of priest. Now St. Sergius lavishly consoled Nicon, and even allowed him to live in his own cell. One can imagine the joy and bliss experienced now by St. Nicon! Under clairvoyant guidance, and through the power of his director's prayers, Nicon gradually acquired strength in his struggle against temptations and all kinds of weakness, and he enjoyed paradisiacal consolation in prayerful communion with God's holy man.

"Nicon's devout heart," his Life records, "was like an open door to his spiritual father; he revealed to him all his thoughts and intentions, so that no doubts or confusion would darken the purity of his conscience." When still alive, St. Sergius named Nicon as his successor. Upon the Saint's death, Nicon became the monastery's abbot. He became renowned and revered in cities, towns and villages. Coming to him as to a spiritual physician, people would throng him (eldership). St. Nicon interrupted his abbacy, however, and spent six years as a recluse. Prior to Edigei's incursion he had a vision: the hierarchs Peter and Alexius and St. Sergius appeared and forewarned him about imminent events, and thus he managed to save the church vessels and books. The monastery was burned to the ground. St. Nicon reestablished it and erected a stone cathedral where he placed St. Sergius' relics. During St. Nicon's abbacy, Holy Trinity Monastery was enriched with patristic literature of an ascetical character.

St. Sylvester of Obnora (†1379),[29] also a disciple of St. Sergius, thristing for hesychasm departed for the far northeast and settled on the bank of the Obnora river. Here he was found by a traveller who had lost his way. This traveller informed the Saint that people used to see bright rays or a column of cloud hovering above his habitation. St. Sylvester shed a few tears when he realized that

27. Kliuchevsky, *Speech: St. Sergius of Radonezh*, p. 43.
28. Commemorated November 17.
29. Commemorated April 25.

his isolation had now been disturbed. He told the traveller that he had been living there for a long time, feeding on tree bark and roots. At first, not having bread, he would grow weak and fall on the earth. But after a certain wondrous man appeared to him and touched him on the hand, he no longer suffered from physical deprivations. Shortly afterwards, as more people learned about the hermit, they came to see him, and soon a monastic community was formed around him.

St. Sylvester himself set off for Moscow to see Metropolitan Alexius, who gave him *antimens* and appointed him the abbot of the first monastery in the Obnora region. The monastery church was dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ. Both distinguished and common people would come to the Saint, seeking spiritual counsel. From time to time he would depart for the sake of seclusion, and each time crowds of people would be waiting for his return. They brought children and sick people who hoped to be healed by the holy man. Miracles which he worked after his death were recorded for many centuries.

3. ST. PAUL OF OBNORA (1317-1429)[30]

St. Paul was one of the outstanding hermits among the saints of the 14th century. He first joined the monastery of the Nativity of Christ at Priluki. Aspiring to higher ascetic endeavors and wishing to have an experienced teacher in acquiring virtues, he came to St. Sergius, who became his elder. St. Paul renounced his own will and submitted entirely to the will of his director. He spent fifteen years in St. Sergius' monastery. Thereupon he travelled north into the impenetrable forests of Vologda, where he lived in the hollow of a linden tree. He was found there by the Athonite hesychast, St. Sergius of Nurma, who became his spiritual father and sharer in the monastic mystery (*sotainnik*). According to his Life, St. Paul "lived like the first man in Paradise: birds and beasts, even wild ones, grazed near his cell, consoling him with their meekness. A hare would come with a fox and feed from the hands of the holy Elder. Birds would fly about, and a bear would come, quietly waiting to be given food. . . . " In the eighth ode of the Canon to the Saint, we read that the wild bloodthirsty beasts would not harm him because of the divine grace abiding within him, but would obey him, thus glorifying all the works of the Lord. Through prayer, contemplation of God, and a profound knowledge of patristic writings, he acquired the gift of penetration and spiritual insight. He was aware of the undisclosed secret thoughts of his fellow-conversers, and he healed them through his grace-given

30. Commemorated January 10.

word. One of the stichera of his Service reads as follows: "O Holy Father Paul, following God thou hast loved all, and by all wast loved, for thy good life and angel-like disposition. Hence, thou hast taken upon thyself the care of souls, guiding them by thy teaching towards their heavenly heritage." In 1389, St. Paul founded a monastery in honor of the Life-Giving Trinity. In this monastery, as we mentioned before, there has remained a written memorial – instructions on the guidance of young monks – which gives us an idea about the monastic life of that time and testifies to the existence of guidance by elders.

Regrettably, the Synodal edition of the Lives of Saints does not refer to the original historical sources of the Lives, where a researcher could find the features which are of interest to him. In hagiographical works he may stumble upon some precious little crumbs, although even there the saints' Lives were not examined from the ascetical and mystical point of view, but from the point of view of history, literature, way of life, etc. We found such valuable excerpts from the Life of St. Paul of Obnora in the work of Professor Kadlubovsky. They were taken from the original Life recorded in the first half of the 16th century, and they portray a great hesychast, because the Northern Thebaid of Russia is in no way inferior to its African prototype. The dwellers of the virgin forests beyond the Volga in their spiritual power, the might of their ascetic life and the height of their attainments were equal to the Fathers of the first centuries of Christianity. But just as the sultry African nature with its clear blue sky, lush colors, its burning sun, and its incomparable moonlit nights, is distinct from the aquarelle soft tones of Russia's northern nature with the azure surface of its lakes and the soft shades of its leafy forests, with their emerald-green of early spring and the rich fulness of their golden auburn tones in September – in the same way the sanctity of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert, elemental and mighty like lava erupting from a volcano, with the brightness of the southern nature, is distinct from the sanctity of Russia, which is quiet, lofty, and crystal-clear as the radiant and quiet evening of the Russian spring. But both in Russia and in Egypt there is the same "noetic activity," the same silence. Here are some citations, taken from Kadlubovsky, concerning St. Paul: "St. Paul, being humble in mind and hating glory and honor from men, loving silence and being a lover of God, entreated St. Sergius for a long time that he command him to remain in solitude." Of St. Paul again it is said that he remained "singing and praying constantly and cleansing the vision of his mind." He took care for the purity of his thoughts, "lest there cleave to his mind any earthly things." Later we read how he "with fervor constantly prayed to God, diligently laboring, cleansing the vision of his mind." Before his repose, St. Paul permanently "began to live in silence, going away from any human dwelling and having his mind constantly in prayer and

heedfulness towards God, cleansing his vision and gathering the light of divine understanding in his heart, and in his purity beholding the glory of the Lord, whereby he was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit."[31]

Muraviev, the author of *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, during the time of his pilgrimage to the Vologda region, when crossing the river Nurma, saw at the bridge a solitary chapel and entered it in order to venerate St. Paul. "His meek visage greeted me there," says Muraviev, "in the rank of other desert-dwellers at the side of the Crucified Lord for Whose sake they had labored so much. In the hands of St. Paul was a scroll with the inscription: *Oh, if you knew the whole power of love*. Such a short reminder in the wilderness was especially moving for the heart and was more eloquent than many oratorical speeches." Right there stood also a pitcher of water with a ladle for the quenching of the thirst of travellers on hot days. "And I remembered the word of the Gospel: *Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward* (Matt. 10:42)."[32]

St. Euthymius of Suzdal (1316-1404)[33] was one of St. Sergius' companions. He is called "the *second Sergius*" in the Service dedicated to him. St. Dionysius of Suzdal, who was then the superior of the Nizhni-Novgorod Monastery tonsured him and guided him as an elder. In 1352, he sent St. Euthymius from his monastery to Suzdal. He encouraged and consoled his disciple and said that God would grant him the gift of clairvoyance. In Suzdal, St. Euthymius founded the Monastery of the Savior. Angels co-celebrated the Liturgy with him. Every sinner seeking salvation was instructed by Euthymius on how to confess his sins. He would restore sick people to health and devils trembled before him. In other words, he was an elder to those who turned to him. He worked many miracles after his death. In 1612, Prince Pozharsky[34] prayed to St. Euthymius as to his heavenly protector, and he was buried in St. Euthymius' monastery.

Another disciple of St. Sergius, **St. Sabbas of Storozhevsk** (†1407),[35] came to Holy Trinity Monastery being already experienced in the spiritual life;

31. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the History of the Ancient Russian Literature of the Lives of Saints* (Warsaw, 1902), pp. 203-207.

32. Andrew Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North* (St. Petersburg, 1855), pp. 23-24. The commemoration of St. Paul of Obnora on January 10 coincides with the commemoration of his friend, St. Macarius of Pisma, who began his ascetic life with St. Sergius and later labored on the Pisma River. He founded the St. Macarius Monastery, which became a part of the Obnora Monastery.

33. Commemorated April 1.

34. Prince Pozharsky raised an army to protect Russia from the Papal attempt to subjugate it to Rome, and was instrumental in the beginning of the Romanov dynasty *(editor)*.

35. Commemorated December 3.

and he brought his ascetic feats to perfection under St. Sergius' guidance. He left St. Sergius' monastery and went to live in solitude. He founded the Dubensk Monastery. Later he replaced St. Nicon in the Holy Trinity Monastery, and then again followed a period of life in silence. The Prince of Zvenigorod provided a site for him to build a new monastery (Storozhevsk).

Thus, the 14th century was the century of St. Sergius: his image was before everyone, and most other ascetics were his disciples and companions. However, there were some who attained sanctity independently of him. We have already mentioned Sts. Arsenius of Konevits and Lazarus of Murom. In the latter's Life we learn of **St. Moses, Archbishop of Novgorod** (†1362),[36] who belonged to the type of ascetic holding the rank of archbishop. Day and night he would instruct those who came to him for counsel. Twice he left the archbishop's chair for the sake of his ascetic labors. When a rebellion occurred in Novgorod, the Archbishop left his seclusion and appeased the people with the words: "My children, do not start a fight in order that the godless may be praised and the holy Church and this city become empty. Do not join the battle." St. Moses fought against pagan customs, among which was the so-called "knocking of barrels." **St. Pachomius of Nerekhta** (†1384),[37] a hermit and contemplative ascetic, founded the Monastery of Nerekhta near Kostroma.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 15TH CENTURY

As we have tried to demonstrate, Russia was under the favorable spiritual influence of Byzantium from the very beginning of its historical existence. This influence was not limited to spiritual aspects only. "A series of aspects of the state, legal and social order of ancient Russia reflected the influence of Byzantine ecclesiastical ideas. Kliuchevsky provided a brilliant analysis of this influence in the pre-Mongolian period. He showed how the Nomocanons (codes of the Graeco-Byzantine Canon Law) affected and transformed our criminal, civil, property, liability, family and marriage laws, how the status of women rose, how slavery waned, how the bondage of usury was curbed, and so forth. Kliuchevsky's analysis is, to a certain extent, applicable also to the entire ancient Russian period: to the Code of Law of Tsars Ivan III and Ivan IV, and even to the code of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich."[38]

36. Commemorated January 25.
37. Commemorated March 21.
38. Professor A. V. Kartashev, *Holy Grand Prince Vladimir, the Father of Russian Culture* (Paris, 1938), p. 19.

ST. MOSES, ARCHBISHOP OF NOVGOROD
The actual ancient covering of his reliquary.
From the Kontzevitch photograph collection.

The Mongol invasion temporarily interrupted contacts with Byzantium. But after the defeat of the Tatars, in the 14th and part of the 15th century, Russian culture experienced a new surge of Byzantine influences.

The 14th century was the time of the rebirth of anchoretism and monasticism, the century of St. Sergius. The 15th century was still rich in sprouts of the spiritual seeds sown in previous centuries. From the monasteries already founded, new monasteries arose, giving new saints. This was a continuation of the epoch of the 14th century, its blossoming, the "golden age" of Russian asceticism; but at the same time it was the eve of crisis and rupture. Professor Florovsky indicates that "this was above all a national and state crisis, bound up with the growth of the Muscovite state, with an awakening of national and political consciousness, with the need for political independence from Constantinople. . . . The cause of the rupture was the Council of Florence. Greek apostasy [at Florence] gave reason to declare Russian independence."[39] "The rejection by Muscovite Russia of the Florentine Unia," according to the precise assessment of the Russian historian Soloviev, "is one of those great decisions which determine the fate of peoples for many centuries ahead. . . . Loyalty to ancient piety, enunciated by the Grand Prince Basil Vasilievich, gave support to the independence of northeastern Russia in 1612. This loyalty made it impossible for the Polish Prince to occupy the Russian throne; it led to the struggle for faith in Polish-dominated areas; it effected the union of Little Russia with Great Russia; it caused the downfall of Poland, the increased power of Russia, and her closer bond with the Orthodox peoples of the Balkan Peninsula." The historian thinks along the purely political line. But thinking along the line of cultural interests, we must note that the historical moment of the rejection of the Unia is one that drew after it a whole epoch. "After this, the inward separation of the Russian world from the West, under the influence of the dream which burst forth of Moscow as the Third Rome, firmly strengthened the specifically Eastern European character of Russian culture, and it was not wiped out either outwardly, nor all the more inwardly, by the great westernizing reform of Peter the Great."[40] Such was the incalculably great significance of this historical step, the rejection of the Unia.

Soon afterwards, the Byzantine Empire perished under the onslaught of the Turks. It became Russia's lot, her historical mission, to continue the great Byzantine culture. At that moment, however, Russia was not yet able to take the Byzantine heritage upon her shoulders; the soul of the Russian people was

39. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 11.
40. Kartashev, *Holy Grand Prince Vladimir*, p. 18.

still in the infant stage of its national development. Ancient Russia was not yet able to create her own native culture, worthy of continuing the Roman culture. Having lost her great teacher, Russia was to be subjected to the influences of principles alien to her; she was to go through the path of humiliation and *kenosis* before, having reached maturity, she would arrive at self-awareness and a realization of the true value of her heritage.

Let us now speak briefly of the inner changes and shocks which the ascetic life underwent in this transitional epoch and the one which followed. Monasticism fell into two currents. The main branch proceeded from St. Cyril of White Lake, the younger companion of St. Sergius and the greatest Saint living at the beginning of the 15th century. He was the head of that school of spiritual activity which, with the lightness and wingedness of spiritual exaltation and divine vision, had room also for service to the world, feeding the hungry in difficult years and nourishing spiritually the people who came to the monastery. To this school belonged the merit of continuing the colonization of the northeast which was begun in the century of St. Sergius. St. Cyril's tradition was given to the "Northern Thebaid" by St. Dionysius of Glushetsk, who likewise lived in the White Lake Monastery; it was he who painted the portrait of the great Saint himself. In the Lives of the ascetics of Vologda and Komel one can feel a reflection of St. Cyril's testament. Spreading to the northeast, the "Northern Thebaid" was still blossoming in the 16th century. But in the 17th century, only in the far north, on the periphery of the Russian state, do we encounter two more clearly delineated types of hesychasts: St. Diodorus of George Hill and St. Eleazar of Anzersk. After them the spiritual activity is almost lost to our view.

The second branch was concentrated around Moscow. Around it was formed a ring of monasteries. Although these latter did take their beginning from Holy Trinity Lavra, spiritually they were inferior to the "Northern Thebaid." These were the coenobitic monasteries which had no striving for contemplative life and silence. In the 15th century they gave two Saints who had a decisive influence on later generations: St. Paphnutius of Borovsk and St. Joseph of Volotsk (Volokolamsk). These Saints, although they did not fully realize the ideals of St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Cyril of White Lake, nonetheless were genuine ascetics and great benefactors of the people. However, their followers did not posess their grace-given qualities; in them the chief aim became the preservation of rules and rites. Intolerance, dry asceticism, severity, the idea of an inexorable and strict justice which obscures the idea of mercy; such was their

tendency. Rule and rite dominated in everything, the keeping of outward rules was given the chief significance, in forgetfulness of the fact that the spirit gives life. On this ground the Old Believers' schism took root, that great spiritual catastrophe[41] which later cleared the way for the secularization of custom and the whole public life of Russia which was brought about by the reforms of Peter.

At the end of the 15th century there occurred the collision, so typical of the epoch, of these two currents in the persons of St. Nilus of Sora and St. Joseph of Volotsk. St. Nilus was the last of the Russian ascetics of the period to make a pilgrimage to the East with the aim of restoring the teaching of the spiritual activity. He visited Mt. Athos, where he became acquainted with the teaching of St. Gregory the Sinaite. St. Nilus was a monk of contemplative life and a hesychast of the purest type. He systematized the teaching of the inward activity. Characteristic of him was his absolute departure from and break with the world.

The dispute over monastery lands divided monasticism into two camps. At the head of the non-possessors stood St. Nilus of Sora, and at the head of those who favored the possession of monstery lands, St. Joseph of Volotsk. The latter was victorious. Thus, what was joined together in the spiritual school of St. Cyril — contemplative life and deeds of charity — were now no longer compatible. St. Nilus took the chief things: the inward activity and the non-possessiveness closely bound up with it, but he lost the tie with the life of the State, and in this was his weak side. St. Joseph, on the contrary, became organically one with the State;[42] his type of monasticism continued the tradition of charitable works, but now it was at the expense of the spiritual activity. Monasticism should not refuse to serve the world for the sake of God, but for it the service of worldly principles is ruinous. When ascetic life departed from the world into the forest depths in the period of colonization, the world ran after it and submitted to it. But from the moment when monasticism undertook to serve worldly principles (the historical rupture of the Council of 1503, at which the question of

41. Concerning the schism, see below: XVII century.

42. After St. Joseph, the abbot of the Monastery of Volokolamsk was Daniel, the future Metropolitan of Moscow, who was able to inspire general confidence in himself. As is known from history, he was an oath-breaker (in the case of Prince Shemyatich), a "conniver" with the Grand Prince (in his marriage to E. Glinskaya), and the destroyer of St. Maximus the Greek. That such a hypocritical type could come out of the monastery of St. Joseph was due to the fact that there was absent from it a school of sobriety and revelation of thoughts, and that attention was concentrated on the keeping of outward rules and not on the inward condition of the monks' souls. Therefore, St. Joseph could be deceived, which in no case could have occurred, for example, with St. Sergius. "As a church administrator Daniel was known to fill important church posts with individuals who shared the views of the Josephite party and, as far as possible, came from St. Joseph's monastery." *Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia*, pp. 922-928.

monastery possessions was resolved in the positive), then the world began to enslave it until it decisively subjected it to itself.

In the middle of the 16th century, the flight of heretics to the monks beyond the Volga called forth a persecution against the latter. Thus the field of battle was left to the Moscow tendency, that of St. Joseph.

At the same time, both the type and character of sanctity were changing inwardly. The school of hesychasts under the guidance of elders gave numerous offspring: the following generations took advantage of the experience of the preceding ones. When this school was forgotten, individual asceticism came to the fore. Now the ascetic had to attain everything personally, by long and difficult experience, not having the ascetic tradition to rely on. Inward cleansing and sobriety were replaced by labors of mortification: iron helmets, chains, every kind of "iron" were its means. The path of sanctity became incomparably more difficult. St. Nilus of Sora in the Foreword to his "Rule" says: "Many have attained this radiant activity by means of instruction, but few have received it directly from God by force of ascetic labor and warmth of faith."[43] He himself testifies to "the difficulty now of obtaining an undeceived instructor."[44] This difficulty, noticed by St. Nilus, refers already to the end of the 15th century.

In the 14th century, St. Sergius saw before him a multitude of beautiful birds which he had never seen before, and heard a mystical voice from the heights of heaven, saying, "thus will thy flock of disciples increase, and after thee they will not die out." But in the 17th century the exact opposite was said to **St. Irenarchus** by the Blessed John the "Big-helmet": "God gives to thee a horse, and on this horse no one but thee will be able to ride or sit." In his immense exploit he remained alone. His path was unique and individual, and by the fierceness of its asceticism it could have no imitators.

And so Russian asceticism, being cut off from Byzantium and being left to itself, was subjected to a process of dissolution and fell into two tendencies. The spiritual tendency soon nearly perished, and the school of spiritual activity was forgotten to such an extent that when St. Paisius Velichkovsky at the end of the 18th century would restore this school and reestablish the institution of elders, the latter would be greeted with mistrust and apprehension as an unheard-of novelty.

43. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, p. 301.

44. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, Introduction to *Patericon* (St. Petersburg, 1880).

ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE (BELOZERSK)

The original portrait of him, showing his small stature.

5. ST. CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE (†1429)[45]

St. Cyril of White Lake (Cosmas in the world) belonged to an impoverished boyar family and was brought up in the home of his well-to-do relative Veniaminov, who was frequently visited by St. Stephen of Makhra, St. Sergius' friend and companion. Under the influence of St. Stephen's talks and example, the young Cosmas chose the monastic way of life. Shortly afterwards he was tonsured by St. Stephen with the name of Cyril and joined the Simonov Monastery. At that time the monastery's superior was its founder, Archimandrite Theodore, St. Sergius' nephew. The novice Cyril found himself under the guidance of a strict ascetic, Elder Michael, the future Bishop of Smolensk. This elder instructed him in the practice of the Jesus Prayer and in his warfare with evil spirits. His obedience was in the bakery and in the kitchen; and while looking at the blazing fire he used to reflect on the infernal flames, shedding tears of repentance; in this way he acquired the gift of tears. His elder forbade Cyril to fast beyond his strength, and ordered him to share the meals with the brethren rather than partake of food at two to three day intervals, as Cyril had wished. Despite this measure, his nightly prayers tired him to complete exhaustion. "Wishing to hide his virtue," he tried to play the fool, thus incurring the displeasure of his superior, who put him on bread and water for a period of six months. Cyril rejoiced at being involuntarily deprived of food. Foreseeing a great ascetic in Cyril, St. Sergius, when visiting his nephew in the Simonov Monastery, would first of all stop at the bakery and talk for hours with Cyril "about the things beneficial to the soul." After Archimandrite Theodore was appointed Bishop of Rostov, Cyril was chosen to replace him as the monastery's abbot, but he soon withdrew into reclusion. Once at night, when he was reading the Akathist, he heard a voice coming from the icon of the Theotokos: Cyril, go forth from here to White Lake. There I have prepared a place for you where you can be saved." Having opened the window, he beheld a column of light to the north, whither the Most Holy Virgin was summoning him.

Together with the monk **St. Therapontes** (†1426),[46] who was one with him in mind and was familiar with the White Lake region, St. Cyril left the monastery and proceeded north across the Volga River. There, in the midst of a dense forest, he finally came upon a beautiful lake; he recognized this spot as that "very beautiful place" which the Mother of God had shown him. For the sake of stricter solitude, the ascetics parted ways. St. Therapontes removed himself some fifteen miles away, where he subsequently founded his famous monastery,

45. Commemorated June 9. [White Lake is *Belozersk* in Russian.]
46. Commemorated May 27.

ST. THERAPONTES OF MOZHAISK AND WHITE LAKE

A 17th-century icon.

which in the 15th century was adorned by Master Dionysius' frescoes.[47] St. Cyril remained alone in his half-earthen cell near the lake. Living in the forest, he was often miraculously saved from mortal danger and human malice. When monks began gathering around him, the Saint accepted the loss of his solitude with humility. He began erecting the Dormition Cathedral and soon established a monastic community.

St. Cyril was endowed with many spiritual gifts: the gift of tears, clairvoyance and wonder-working. He resurrected the monk Dalmatus, in order to enable him to partake of Holy Communion. The waters obeyed him when with the sign of the Cross he calmed the waves; and fire submitted to the same sign when, holding the cross in his hands, he stopped it from engulfing a building. He increased the amount of wine needed for the Liturgy. Whenever there was a shortage of anything, the brethren would not even bother to come and tell him about it, knowing well that through his prayer God would provide them with everything. And not only the monks, but the entire surrounding population was fed through his prayers during a famine; and whatever the visitors received at the monastery was miraculously multiplied.

According to the hagiographer Muraviev, "many sick people suffering from all kinds of diseases, the blind and feeble, were brought to St. Cyril, as his disciples have testified, and he healed them all by anointing them with holy water and oil, and they returned home in good health, thanking God and His saint, Cyril."[48]

The character of St. Cyril's miracles involuntarily carries us back to Evangelical times. "When there happened to be a shortage of bread, and the brethren implored him to send a request for alms to one of the Christ-loving neighbors, he objected with fervent faith: 'If God and the Most Pure Virgin will forget us in this place, why should we remain in this life?' "[49]

Concerning the feeding of the hungry during a famine, the Saint's Life records: "Many poor people came to the Saint's monastery because they were hungry. The Saint ordered that bread be distributed to all who asked for it, and so at all times beggars were given enough bread. . . . More people who lived around the monastery heard that the hungry were being fed there, and they, too, came and were fed. As much bread as was distributed, by that much did it increase and abound. . . . And so the small amount of bread fed many people."[50]

47. This monastery was restored as a convent community by Abbess Thaisia of Leushino, who appointed one of her sisters as abbess. This sister, Seraphima, became a New Martyr *(editor)*.

48. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, p. 161.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

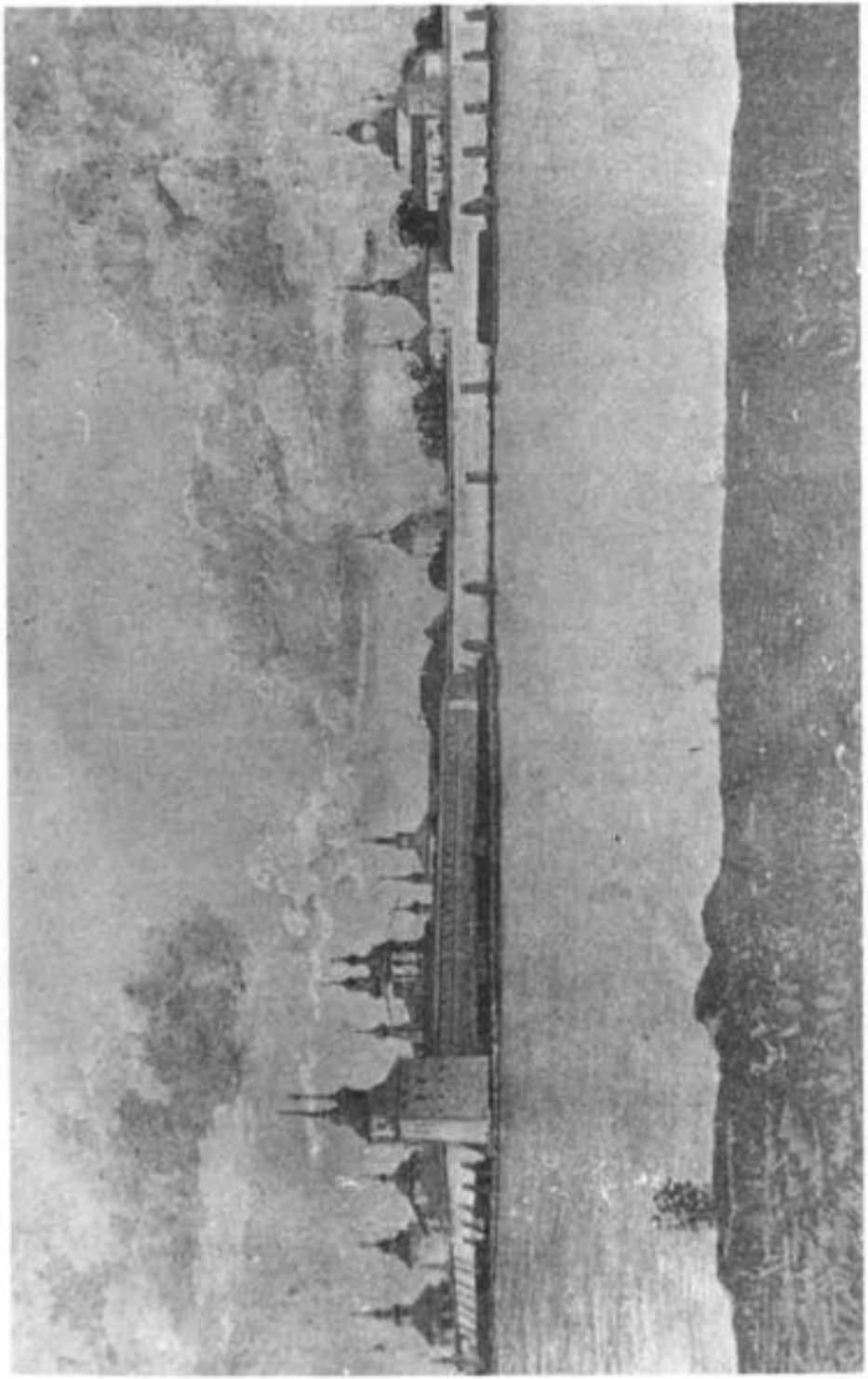
50. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 39.

The monastery's work of charity continued also after the Saint's death. Abbot Christophorus (1428-33) "ransomed many prisoners of war. . . . "[51] During Triphon's abbacy (until the middle of the 15th century), when the monastery was building a church and its financial situation was strained, a great famine occurred in the area. Many would come to the monastery in search of food. No one was refused there, and hungry children were particularly well cared for. But the thrifty steward, "small in faith," began to fear that the monastery might not have enough means to provide for everybody: feeding the brethren, paying and feeding the workers, and feeding the hungry. The service personnel of the monastery began to restrict the almsgiving, which indeed soon resulted in diminishing supplies. The Abbot once again decided to feed all who came. The White Lake Monastery fed 600 people daily until the new harvest. In his famous letter to St. Cyril's monastery, Ivan the Terrible wrote: "So far Cyril's monastery has fed many lands in the days of famine."[52]

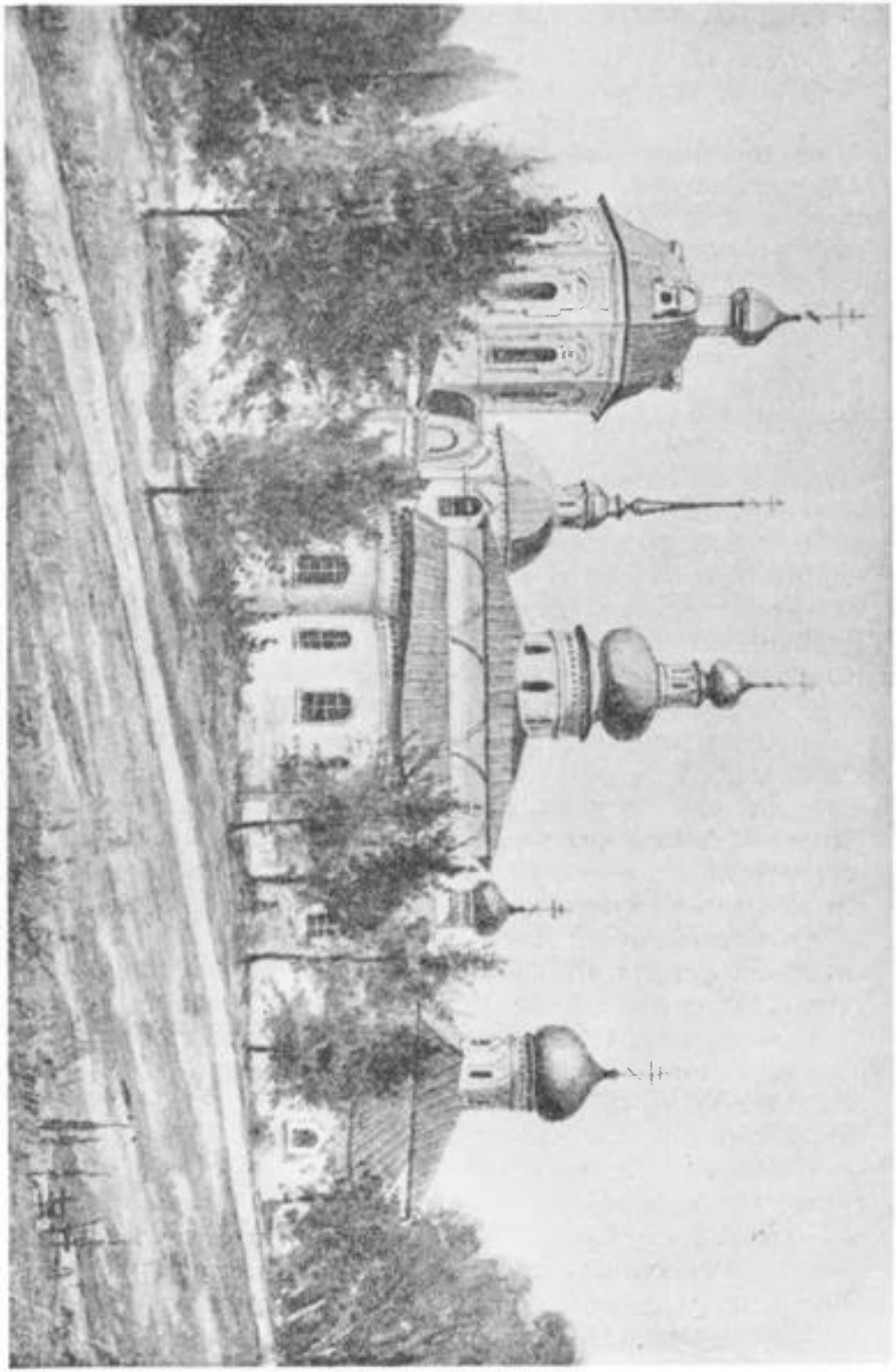
Kadlubovsky writes: "Cyril's Life glorified the non-acquisitiveness of the Saint, his meek, merciful and sympathetic attitude to people, his and his disciples' spiritual independence from the powerful of this world."[53] Indeed, both the Saint's words and deeds testify to his utter non-possessiveness. The Saint thought: "If we decide to keep villages, we will burden ourselves with more cares, which could interrupt the silence practiced by our brethren."[54] When notified that the boyar Daniel Andreyevich had willed a village to his monastery, St. Cyril "did not wish to accept the village, saying that he did not need any while he was alive, but that after his death the brethren were free to do what they wanted."[55]

Although we read in his Life that the monastery did not possess any villages in the Saint's lifetime, historical documents speak of some acquisitions of land. Professor Kadlubovsky explains this contradiction as follows: "it should be added that often a Life, while changing the factual side of a Saint's life at its own risk, and deviating from the real truth, would, however, preserve the ideal truth. The sharp disagreement between the evidence provided by the documents and that of St. Cyril's Life may be accounted for by the fact that the Saint often refused to accept villages offered to his monastery by neighboring landowners, and only the grumbling of the brethren, who were unhappy with the unmercenariness of their abbot, and maybe an apprehension about the future of his monastery, compelled him to follow the general practice of monasteries."[56]

51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*
53. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 187.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 168.



GENERAL VIEW OF ST. CYRIL'S "LAVRA" ON WHITE LAKE
An aquarelle from the Kontzevitch photograph collection.



CHURCHES OF THE GREAT MONASTERY OF THE DORMITION ON WHITE LAKE

We see that love for his fellow man was St. Cyril of White Lake's basic feature. "The Saint insisted upon the service of love. It was manifested in his numerous miracles and in his letters to many princes. Thus, to Prince Andrew of Mozhaisk he wrote. ' You would do well to give alms, as much as you can, my dear lord: since you cannot fast and are not diligent in praying, your charity would compensate for these shortcomings.' In his letters to the Grand Prince of Moscow and some independent princes, St. Cyril inspired them with the ideal of a just and humane exercise of power; he implored the Grand Prince to be reconciled with the princes of Suzdal: 'Look and see where the truth is before you.' He suggested an entire governmental and social program to the Prince of Mozhaisk: incorruptibility of the courts, abolition of illegal trading of alcoholic beverages and custom-houses, as well as the punishment of 'thieves,' the 'curbing' of the use of foul language and the promoting of church piety. Chosen by God and called upon to teach piety to his people, a prince is not an autocrat, and nothing points to his power over the Church and clerics. Firm yet meek independence from the powerful of this world characterized both St. Cyril and his entire school."[57]

St. Cyril, who left his exhortations to princes, refused to pay a visit to Prince Yuri Dmitrievich. "I cannot disrupt the monastery rule." St. Martinian, however, appeared in Moscow in Basil II's palace in order to expose the Grand Prince, who had imprisoned and shackled his boyar despite a promise given to the latter. "He was not afraid of either punishment or imprisonment, but remembered John Chrysostom's words that a king's interdiction is like a lion's fury." St. Gregory of Pelshma exposed Prince Yuri Dmitrievich and his son Shemyaka, who had wrongly seized the princely power. In any case, these encounters with the world, as well as any ventures out into the world, were very rare and exceptional. The northern ascetics strove for silent solitude first of all.[58]

6. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. CYRIL

St. Cyril of White Lake directly continued the traditions of St. Sergius of Radonezh, like him surpassing his contemporaries in his abundance of spiritual gifts. He was the leader of the ascetics of his epoch, when "mental activity" was particularly flourishing. Indeed, St. Dionysius of Glushetsk, the head of the en-

57. Fedotov, *The Saints of Ancient Russia*, pp. 158-159.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

tire northeastern monasticism, *i.e.*, of the Northern Thebaid, had spent some time in St. Cyril's monastery while the Saint was still alive, at which time he painted the latter's portrait. Similarly, the non-possessive anchorites of the whole trans-Volga region were inspired by St. Cyril. His monastery produced also Paisius Yaroslavov, the elder and teacher of St. Nilus of Sora.

St. Martinian of White Lake (1397-1483)[59] was a disciple of St. Cyril, who brought him up from early childhood. In his Life we read: "The blessed one remembered the instructions of his teacher, St. Cyril the Wonder-worker, for the latter exhorted him to observe *silence* and non-acquisitiveness and to avoid any feelings harmful to the soul."[60] These words speak of the Saint's spiritual endeavors. We have already mentioned that he exposed Basil II when visiting him in the palace.

St. Sabbatius of Solovki (†1435),[61] originally of St. Cyril's monastery, spent some time in Valaam; later he lived on an uninhabited island and was one of the founders of the Solovki Monastery. He was a disciple of St. Cyril's school, which was based on the tradition of the Holy Fathers. **St. Gennadius, Archbishop of Novgorod** (1484-1504)[62] was his disciple. **St. Alexander of Oshevensk** (†1479),[63] tonsured in White Lake Monastery, founded the Dormition Monastery of Oshevensk. **St. Alexander of Kushta** (†1439)[64] founded a monastery by the Kubensky lake. He received the monastic tonsure from St. Dionysius the Athonite, Archbishop of Rostov.

St. Dionysius of Glushetsk (†1437),[65] another monk tonsured by St. Hierarch Dionysius the Athonite, lived for nine years with his Athonite abbot, whose name he received. St. Dionysius lived for some time in the White Lake Monastery among the disciples of St. Cyril, the "holy image" of whom, according to Muraviev, "he preserved in an icon with his brush."[66] It follows that St. Dionysius combined within himself both the Athonite traditions and those of St. Sergius. His distinguishing feature was the attainment of "love for the poor."[67] In an encomium dedicated to him we read: "He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, was a protector of the insulted and widows, consoled those who sor-

59. Commemorated January 12.
60. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 267.
61. Commemorated September 27.
62. Commemorated December 4.
63. Commemorated April 20.
64. Commemorated June 9.
65. Commemorated June 1.
66. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, p. 94. This icon is now in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. (See V. N. Lazarev, *The Art of Novgorod*, Moscow, 1947, Table 129.)
67. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 40.

ST. DIONYSIUS OF GLUSHETSK

A 17th-century icon.

rowed, helped the helpless and freed the slaves."[68] His ascetiscism revealed the Athonite influence upon him. "Train your mind to seek God alone and to be assiduous in prayer": thus taught St. Dionysius. His hagiographer says: "The Saint's asceticism was that of a true monk; it urged him to settle in the desert, that he might never be deprived of spiritual endeavor."[69] Before his death he heard the voice of the Holy Theotokos, Who promised heavenly protection to the brethren of his monastery.

The life of **St. Amphilochius of Glushetsk** (†1452)[70] mentions a characteristic scene when St. Dionysius was training his disciple, **St. Macarius of Sosnovetsk** (†1480),[71] to function as an elder, out of holy obedience. St. Amphilochius arrived with the request to be accepted into the monastery. (To this St. Amphilochius, St. Dionysius would later say: "I am entrusting seniority to my disciple Amphilochius.) St. Dionysius, turning to St. Macarius, said: "God has directed to our monastery Monk Amphilochius, who wants to offer prayer to God with us." "Forgive me my ignorance, Father, I do not know what to say," answered St. Macarius. "Say, O obedient one, whatever God will place in your heart," ordered the Abbot; and St. Macarius said: "Blessed be God, *Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth* (I Tim. 2:4). "May God ordain you to speak that which is profitable," added St. Dionysius.

"In St. Dionysius' lifetime, 'that land suffered great famine.' Many people came to the Saint's monastery asking for bread, 'for the Saint gave generous alms to those who asked for them. More and more people came, and the Saint was in no way annoyed and gave even more.' The steward pointed out to the Saint that the supplies were dwindling. But the latter reprimanded the steward and instructed him to be charitable without calculating, reminding him that the Lord will punish us on the Day of Judgment for lack of mercy, and that almsgiving will be of particular help to monks when facing the judgement of Christ: 'Nothing will help us like alms. Mercy to the poor is like a loan to God.' Thus he thought and taught."[72]

In this he is revealed as a disciple of St. Cyril of White Lake. Beginning with St. Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, love for the poor characterized all Russian ascetics.

St. Gregory of Pelshma (†1451),[73] a friend and disciple of St. Dionysius of Glushetsk, lived to be 127 years old. He was a descendant of the princes of

68. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
69. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 197.
70. Commemorated October 12.
71. Commemorated October 12 and May 13.
72. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 41.
73. Commemorated September 30.

Lopotov in Galich of Kostroma. He strove for silence. He avoided being made an abbot in Galich by fleeing to Rostov, but in vain, for there he was made an archimandrite and was to reestablish the Monastery of the Savior. His desire for silence, however, did not leave him. Finally he came to St. Dionysius and asked to be accepted as his disciple. The mutual love of these two ascetics was such that they had one will, as it were.[74] St. Gregory may be characterized by his contempories' comments that there was no conceit in him, and that he "uprooted" all harmful thoughts. St. Dionysius taught him: "Train your mind in all diligence to search for God alone, to be assiduous in prayer. Strive to help the poor, orphans and widows; do good while you have the time, be true in glorifying God and doing His will, and the Lord will grant you forgiveness and will enable you to contemplate and to strive for things on high, where Christ abides, sitting on the right hand of God in heaven."[75] St. Dionysius said of St. Gregory that "in his soul he had no conceit, and he was purifying himself in fear and trembling in the service of the Lord."[76] Further on in the Life we read that "Gregory was following his path joyfully and without stumbling, keeping his mind on things divine and purifying his heart of all passions."[77] When St. Gregory had matured for complete silence, St. Dionysius allowed him to go eastwards to live the life of a hermit. He arrived at the river Sukhona. When the dawn broke, the Saint picked up a cross and went through the forests and swamps in the direction whence he heard bells pealing, and where subsequently the Pelshma Monastery was established. St. Gregory "instructed his disciples and lay people and all who wanted to achieve salvation." In other words, he was an elder. Moreover, he defended justice and exposed wrongful acts of princes, and he suffered persecution. In those times other saints acted likewise.

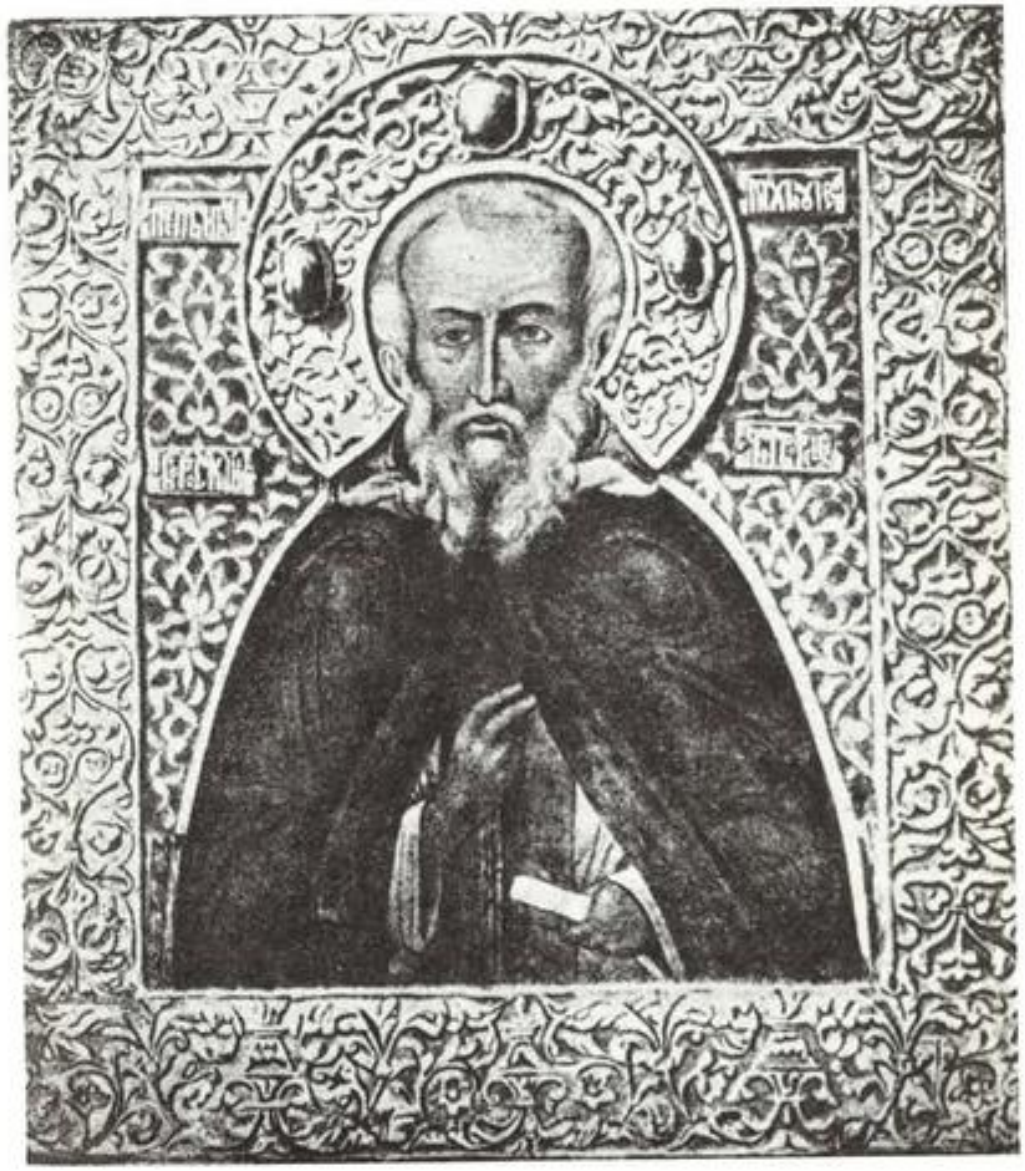
St. Gregory of Pelshma, being a disciple of St. Dionysius of Glushetsk, adopted his teacher's instructions to "welcome the poor victims of famine with gladness."[78] This tradition went back to St. Cyril and St. Sergius, whose disciple, St. Nicon, speaking of love for one's fellow men, said: "If possible, do not let anyone leave you empty-handed, lest you neglect Christ appearing as the one in need." It is clear, says Smirnov, that "St. Nicon shared the views of his teachers regarding love for the poor."[79] The Jerusalem Rule [of St. Sabbas the Sanctified], adopted by Russian monasticism in the middle of the 14th century,

74. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 195.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 41.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

turned out to be akin to the Russian spirit. "The monks of Palestine found time to serve the world as well. St. Euthymius converted the whole Arab tribe to Christianity; St. Sabbas established a series of hospitals and refuges. They both participated in ecclesiastical struggles of their time, speaking up against heresies, both in cities and imperial palaces. Holy Russia found this idea worthy of emulation, imbuing it with her own talent and softening its strictness with her own fragrance."[80]

St. Macarius of Kolyazin (†1483)[81] came from a family of boyars. His father, the boyar Kozha, was renowned for his military exploits under Grand Prince Basil the Dark [*i.e.*, the Blind]. St. Macarius began his monastic life in the Klubokovsky Monastery. Having gone through the stage of external asceticism, and desirous of silence, he obtained his abbot's blessing and departed for the Volga in order to lead a solitary life between two lakes in a forest, some eighteen miles from the town of Kashin. Wild animals would not attack him; they showed their gentle disposition towards St. Macarius, and he shared his meager fare with them. Such was the height of his spiritual perfection. Monks began gathering around him. For a long time he declined to assume the duties of a priest and abbot. The name 'Kolyazino' derives from the name Kolyaga — the Saint's malefactor who subsequently repented and was tonsured by him. Kolyaga left his estate to the monastery; and St. Macarius, out of humility, named the monastery after him. St. Joseph of Volotsk (Volokolamsk) quotes the great Elder Metrophanes Byvaltsev, who had spent nine years on Mt. Athos: "My efforts and my journey to the Holy Mountain were all in vain, because one can find salvation in the Kolyazin Monastery just as well; the life here is not unlike that in a coenobitic monastery on Mt. Athos." The Kolyazin Monastery produced several founders of new monasteries, such as St. Ephraim of Perekop and St. Paisius of Uglich (a nephew of St. Macarius). St. Macarius became known as a wonder-worker even in his lifetime. Although he dressed poorly and provided a good example by doing all kinds of work at the monastery, he was not against acquisitions as was St. Cyril of White Lake. In his lifetime, the monastery was enriched with both inhabited and uninhabited land properties. Thirty-eight years after the Saint's death, his relics were found incorrupt. . . . This occurred in the process of erecting a new church. The Moscow Council of 1547 decreed that St. Macarius of Kolyazin should be commemorated along with other saints, and he was listed among the "great wonder-workers." Bassian Patrikeyev reproached the simplicity of St. Macarius' life and called him a "village peasant." Bassian Patrikeyev, himself a

80. Fedotov, *The Saints of Ancient Russia,* p. 38.
81. Commemorated March 17. All quotations are from the Lives of Saints.



ST. PAPHNUTIUS OF BOROVSK

prince, was tonsured a monk by force, and he remained an aristocratic snob in a monk's garb. He entered into the polemics on non-acquisitiveness with great passion, and was not fastidious in his choice of expressions. Sentenced to imprisonment in the St. Joseph of Volotsk Monastery, he died there among his enemies.

St. Paphnutius of Borovsk (†1477)[82] was a disciple of St. Nicetas of Vysotsk, who in his turn was a disciple of and was tonsured by St. Sergius of Radonezh. St. Paphnutius inherited from his teacher an outstanding experience in spiritual guidance, and he skillfully applied both mercy and severity when they were required. According to St. Joseph of Volotsk, St. Nicetas "foresaw future events and would tell the secret thoughts of the brethren." "He was generous and merciful or harsh when required."[83] St. Paphnutius was the spiritual father of the monastery's brethren and many laymen, and was renowned for his experience in imposing penances. "Not only monks but lay people as well would come to this holy man to confess, for he was very wise and knowledgeable in sacred rules, and knew what penance would suit each individual."[84] He spoke in accordance with the law of God, and his deeds agreed with his words. "He was never embarrassed before a prince or a boyar, nor appeased by the offerings brought by the rich, but he demanded a strict observance of laws and the keeping of the commandments of God from men in power, while he dealt in a simple manner with ordinary people, calling them his brothers."[85] Yuri Vasilievich, Prince of Dmitrov, a brother of Grand Prince Ivan III, was a spiritual son of the Saint, and often visited his spiritual father. Prince Yuri himself commented: "When going to confession to Fr. Paphnutius, I would feel my legs giving way under me."[86] This speaks of the Saint's impartiality and strictness.

St. Ioasaph of Kamensk (1430-1457)[87] came from the family of the princes of Zaozersk. He was tonsured a monk in the Kamensk Monastery of the Savior [in the Vologda region], and was in obedience to an elder. Despite his youth (he became a monk at the age of twenty), St. Ioasaph attained the state of spiritual contemplation. His hagiographer speaks of Christ appearing to him and bidding him keep the commandments "in meekness, truth and humility of heart."

"The author proceeds to another episode of the Saint's life, emphasizing and praising his virtue of non-acquisitiveness. An independent prince of Rzhevsk,

82. Commemorated May 1.
83. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 50.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*
87. Commemorated September 10.

Boris Vasilievich, St. Ioasaph's uncle on his father's side, happened to bring gifts to the Saint: gold and silver. At first St. Ioasaph refused to see his relative, not wishing to be disturbed by the feeling of worldly love, but then he yielded to his uncle's request. He gave the following reply to the Prince: 'We need no gold or silver if we want to live in this desert, and no man living here wants to accept anything of what you have.' He asked that the offerings be distributed among the poor. The Prince complied with the request."[88]

The Life of St. Ioasaph, written in 1547, was not highly regarded as a historic document by Professors Kliuchevsky and Konoplev. However, Professor Kadlubovsky thought that "as cultural-historical material, this Life may deserve a different evaluation." Also, "in this Life one should above all acknowledge the significance of inner ascetic labor, divine contemplation, profound immersion within oneself, warfare with sinful thoughts, lofty reverence for the feeling of love as the highest virtue, and non-acquisitiveness, rather than external asceticism."[89]

"The blessed youth added labor to labor," wrote Andrew Muraviev, "as if anticipating his imminent departure from this world (he died at the age of twenty-seven), and attained an angel-like state while still on earth. By the power of grace abiding in him, he was once lifted in spirit on the wings of prayer into the abodes of Paradise, where he contemplated the Church of the firstborn mentioned by the Apostle (Heb. 12:23), and having partaken there of the knowledge of God, he avoided earthly food: he ate only once a week, on Sunday after Holy Communion, and then fasted until the next Sunday, according to the author of his Life."[90]

St. Ioasaph of Kamensk lived during the epoch when the practice of "inward activity" flourished in the Northern Thebaid. He survived St. Dionysius of Glushetsk by only twenty years, and his Life is in perfect harmony with the spirit of that time.

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, being himself of Vologda, was familiar with the holy places and men of the region. He said that according to the handwritten Life, St. Ioasaph practiced "mental prayer" as suggested by the *Tsvetnik* written by the Russian Hieromonk Dorotheus. Bishop Ignatius placed this book on a level with the works of St. Isaac the Syrian, as an instruction for practicing higher contemplative prayer.[91]

88. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, pp. 270-271.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, p. 405.
91. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 482.

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807-1867)[92] is closely bound to the area of the Northern Thebaid. After all, it was his birthplace and the place of his initial ascetic endeavors. His father was a landowner in the Vologda province. Ignatius began his ascetic life in the New Lake Monastery under the guidance of Elder Theophanes.[93] Then he lived in the Ploshchansk Monastery with Elder Leonid, whom he later followed to the Optina Monastery. He was finally tonsured a monk and ordained a priest in the monastery of St. Dionysius of Glushetsk. From there he was sent to build the Pelshma Monastery. His Life abounds with the names and old traditions of eldership in his native Vologda region; and he himself was one of the prominent representatives of the newly resurrected practice of eldership. Therefore his reference to St. Ioasaph practicing "mental prayer" in accordance with the *Tsvetnik*, the work of a purely Russian writer, is of special interest, since Bishop Ignatius was a specialist in Russian hagiography, very familiar with the holy men of his region and the science of "mental activity."

7. ST. NILUS OF SORA (†1508)[94]

The noble family of the Maikovs counts St. Nilus of Sora among their ancestors. It is quite probable that he was of noble birth. Although he called himself a "villager," the circumstance of his bearing the name of Maikov[95] indicates his affiliation with that well-known family. Moreover, St. Nilus copied books and was known to be a "fast writer."[96] Consequently, he belonged to cultured society; this is also evident from his style of writing, his rare refined feelings, and his manner of expressing himself with a lyrical gift. Monasticism he embraced early, "from my youth."[97]

Kliuchevsky writes: "The monk of St. Cyril's monastery, St. Nilus, lived for a long time on Mt. Athos. He observed Athonite and Byzantine sketes, and upon his return to his native land he founded the first skete in Russia on the banks of the river Sora in the White Lake region. The skete-life is the middle form of asceticism, between the coenobitic and the hermitic life. A skete is like a

92. Commemorated April 30. Canonized at the millenium of the Baptism of Russia in July, 1988 *(editor)*.

93. Commemorated December 3. Archimandrite Theophanes of New Lake (Novoezersk) Monastery was a disciple of Elder Theodore of Sanaxar and Elder Sophronius, who in turn were disciples of St. Paisius Velichkovsky *(editor)*.

94. Commemorated April 7 and May 7.

95. A. S. Archangelsky, *St. Nilus of Sora* (St. Petersburg, 1882), p. 3.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ST. NILUS OF SORA

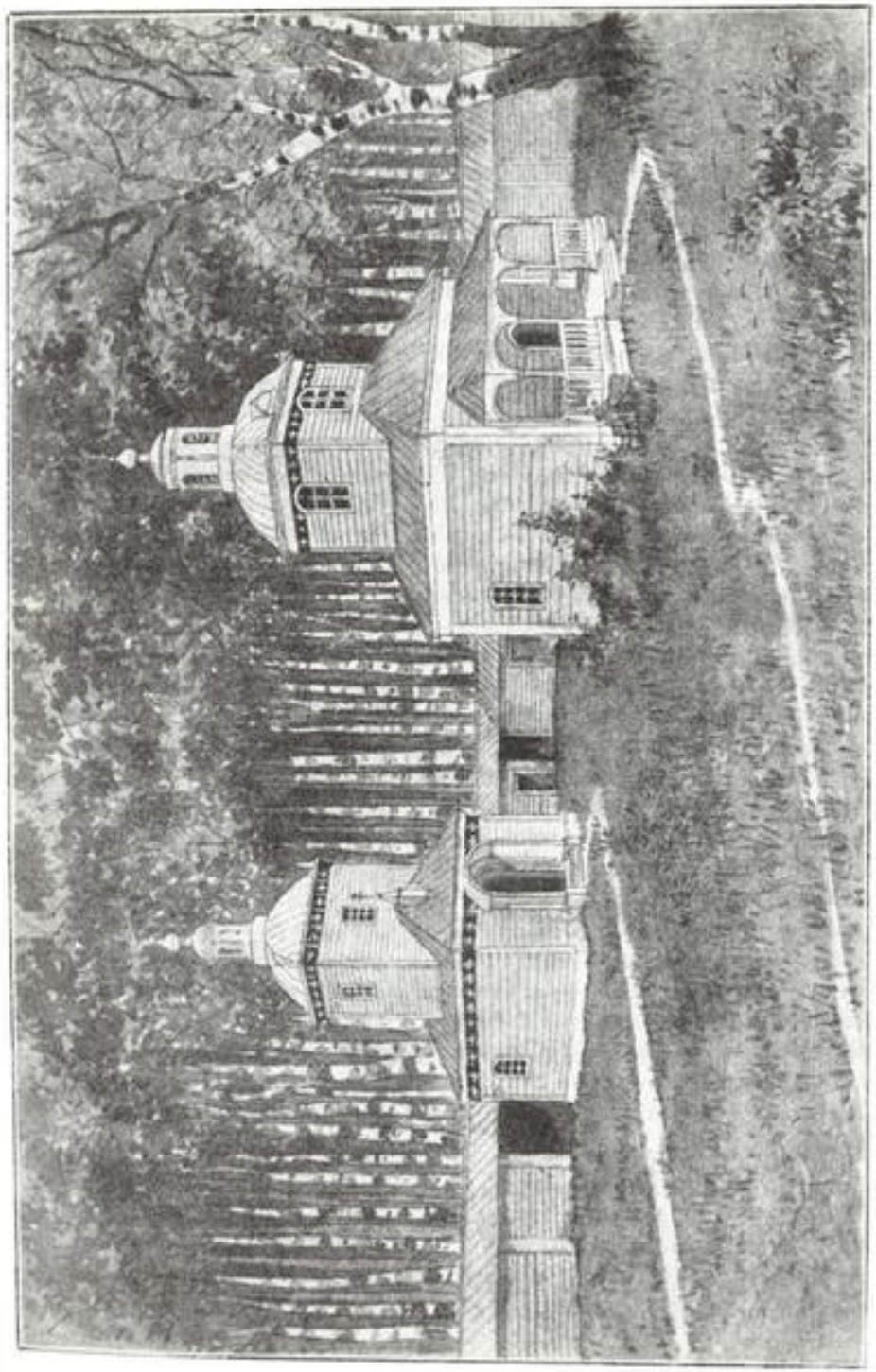
A miniature from a 17th-century manuscript.

detached dwelling consisting of two to three cells, rarely more, and it is like a coenobitic monastery in that its brethren share their food, clothes and work. Ascetic labor in the skete is *noetic or mental activity*. ('Whoever prays with his lips alone, neglecting his mind, prays to the air: God heeds the mind.') In other words, prayer of the mind is a concentrated inner labor of the spirit, when the 'mind guards the heart from evil thoughts' and passions induced from outside or arising from disorderly human nature. The weapons to be used against them are contemplative spiritual prayer, silence, and constant watchfulness over one's mind."[98] St. Nilus had a special gift of discernment. He was the teacher of the wise middle path: "Without discernment, good actions can be turned to evil because they are done at the wrong time or in excess. But when discernment establishes the time and the measure, then the resulting benefit is indeed marvelous. There is a time for silence and a time for quiet conversation, a time for unceasing prayer and a time for devout worship. One should not dare to ascend prematurely. The middle way is easier to pursue. The middle way has less stumbling." But although St. Nilus pointed to the middle way, "one should not think that this leads one along the easy way." He taught how to struggle with sin "with reason and with elegance." St. Nilus wrote to his pupil, St. Cassian of Uglich: "You see, my brother, that ever since ancient times, all God-pleasers have been saved through sorrows, grief and oppression." He taught the remembrance of the hour of death and the futility of worldly life: "This life is smoke, vapor, dust and ashes." He praised "tears of repentance, tears of love, tears of salvation, tears purifying the darkness of my mind."[99]

History remembers St. Nilus for his non-acquisitiveness. He should also be remembered as a teacher and elder who placed great emphasis on the significance of guidance by elders and the counsel of "discerning and spiritual men." In the introduction to his Rule, St. Nilus quoted St. Simeon the New Theologian: "Many have acquired this light-giving spiritual activity (prayer) through instructions, and there are some who have received it directly from God through their ascetic endeavor and fervent faith. It is by no means a small and easy task to find a trustworthy teacher, *i.e.*, a man who has acquired practical wisdom in the spiritual path of the sacred Scriptures. However, if such a teacher cannot be found, then one should turn to the Scriptures directly, according to the word of the Gospel: 'Study the Scriptures, and you shall find eternal life in them.' "[100]

A. S. Archangelsky, the author of a scholarly work on St. Nilus of Sora, speaks of the end of the 15th century, the epoch of the Saint, in the darkest col-

98. Kliuchevsky, *Russian History*, Part II (Petrograd, 1923), p. 348.
99. Fedotov, *The Saints of Ancient Russia*, p. 171.
100. Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, p. 301.



ST. NILUS' SKETE OF THE DORMITION

Monastic chapels and dwellings. *Left:* the Golgotha Chapel. *Right:* the Gethsemane Chapel.

ors. And thus on that dark, dreary background of total savagery, there brightly emerges the humble image of the Saint as an enlightened man who embraces questions of faith in their profoundly evangelical concept. He was a learned systematizer. In clear, simple forms, he systematized the teaching on inward activity. A comparison suggests itself between him and Theophan the Recluse or Ignatius Brianchaninov. Indeed, St. Nilus of Sora, Paisius Velichkovsky, Ignatius Brianchaninov, Theophan Vyshensky the Recluse, as well as the Optina Elders, are links of the same chain of instructor-writers expounding the teaching of inward activity adapted to the concepts and the way of life of their contemporaries.

Next to St. Nilus of Sora, at the turn of the 15th and the 16th centuries there stands out another mystic ascetic, the blessed Elder **Paisius Yaroslavov** (not canonized). His monastic life goes back to the monastery of St. Cyril. Writing about this White Lake Monastery, St. Joseph of Volotsk says that "St. Cyril's concern about monastic virtues is evident in his teaching preserved as a living tradition in his monastery, which teaching shines like a light on a candlestand even now."[101] We do not know in detail about the inner life of this monastery, but we know that abbots appointed there from other monasteries would often violate the Saint's behests. Then "the more senior and greater elders, unable to endure seeing St. Cyril's tradition trampled and neglected, would leave the monastery; having learned about this, the ruling prince would order the removal of the abbot in question from St. Cyril's monastery, and again all the elders would come back,"[102] wrote the same St. Joseph. These events took place in the middle of the 15th century, when Paisius Yaroslavov, the elder of St. Nilus of Sora, was a monk in White Bluff Monastery, having labored for God from his youth. It is quite possible that Paisius was among the persecuted monks. Information about him is fragmentary. Nevertheless, from one of such fragments we learn about the relationship between Paisius and Nilus: "(At the Council of 1503) there were Elder Paisius Yaroslavov with his disciple Elder Nilus, with the name of Maikov."[103] In the Imperial Public Library were kept *Two Epistles of a Certain Elder Nilus about the Benefit of Divine Scriptures*. If these epistles belong to St. Nilus of Sora, they could not have been written to anyone else but Paisius Yaroslavov. In the first Epistle we read: "O venerable Father, do not forget your miserable son and pray to the Lord for me. . . . Deign to be always benevolent to me, your holiness, poor wretch that I am, and do not refuse to guide me, the unworthy one, on the path of salvation." In the second Epistle we find: "Receive

101. Archangelsky, *St. Nilus of Sora*, p. 11.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

my sinful soul in confession. . . . I cannot bare the wounds of my soul to anyone but you, my lord; before you alone who did heal my old wounds can I expose them."[104] These Epistles reveal the profound bond which existed between the Elder and his disciple. While preparing himself to fight the heresy of the Judaizers in 1489, Archbishop Gennadius of Novgorod wrote to Archbishop Joseph of Rostov, asking him "to send for Paisius and Nilus, to take counsel from them and to discuss the matter in all seriousness . . . and to give a written answer (to Archbishop Gennadius) whether Paisius and Nilus could visit him to discuss the matter of these heresies."[105] This simultaneous appeal to both Elders places them on the same level, as it were. In the same year, during Elder Paisius' visit to Moscow, the Grand Prince took his counsel regarding Metropolitan Gerontius and tried to persuade him to take the latter's place. Paisius, however, "did not desire to become a metropolitan." In the 80's of the 15th century, Blessed Paisius was living in the Kamenny Monastery of the Savior, with which is connected his literary work: "*History of the Kamenny Monastery*, written by the holy Elder Paisius Yaroslavov."[106]

In this history, Elder Paisius presented information on Archbishop Dionysius the Athonite, the founder of the northeastern branch of contemplative asceticism. Elder Paisius' notes served as the basis for the Life of St. Ioasaph of Zaozersk. Finally, Elder Paisius was known to have been the Abbot of the Holy Trinity (St. Sergius') Lavra: "The Grand Prince forced him (Paisius) to become the Abbot of St. Sergius' Holy Trinity Monastery. He was unable to direct the monks onto the path of God — to prayer, fasting and abstinence. They wanted to kill him, for there were tonsured Boyars and princes among them who did not wish to obey; and he left the abbacy."[107] This was one of the symptoms of discord between the Transvolga and Moscow monastic currents. It is well known that both Elders, Paisius and Nilus, participated at the Councils of 1490 and 1503, where they spoke against the punishment of heretics and against the ownership of land by monasteries.

St. Innocent of Komel (†1521)[108] was a disciple of St. Nilus of Sora. He was born at the beginning of the 15th century. His written Life was destroyed in 1538 during the incursion of the Kazan Tatars. A brief description of his life has been preserved in a manuscript belonging to Count Uvarov, no. 1247, and a short

104. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
106. In the *Orthodox Converser* of 1861, Part I, p. 198, there is an indication that the above-mentioned event, which was written about by Blessed Paisius, could have occurred in 1481.
107. Golubinsky, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. II, p. 624.
108. Commemorated March 19.

copy in the Anthology of the Public Library. St. Innocent travelled to the East together with St. Nilus of Sora, and later labored in St. Nilus' skete on the river Sora. From there he departed to Komel and founded a coenobitic monastery on the river Yeda. St. Innocent is supposed to have written the Foreword to the Rule of St. Nilus of Sora and appendices on the meaning of fasting. According to Professor Kadlubovsky, "the Saint's general characteristics do not present any distinct features, but comparing his Life with those discussed above (the Volokolamsk Patericon), one cannot but notice the absence of references to external ascetic endeavors, to observation of ritual rules and instructions. However, the author (St. Innocent) reveals study and thorough 'researching' of the Scriptures, and a profound depth of thought. His hagiographer wrote that the Saint spent time in prayer, distinguished himself in obedience, 'was of a humble nature and meek appearance, and diligently studied the Divine Scriptures, immersing himself in them with his whole mind.' "[109]

St. Cassian of Uglich (†1504)[110] was a Greek of the family of the Mangupa princes. (Ruins of the city of Mangupa are near Simferopol.) His secular name was Constantine – from Constantinople. Upon the Turkish invasion of the city he found himself in Rome, and together with Sophia Paleologue arrived in Russia. There he was appointed a diocesan judge with Archbishop Ioasaph. He happened to visit the Therapontes Monastery, and there he remained. Tonsured a monk, he was in obedience to Elder Philaret, who was likened to an "angel of God." Obedient and submissive to his elder, St. Cassian soon met St. Nilus of Sora and followed the latter's guidance. Two epistles of St. Nilus addressed to St. Cassian have been preserved: *On Tempting Thoughts* and *Consolation in Sorrows*. At first, St. Cassian settled on the river Uchma, but having lived through the flood of the Volga, he established another community on a more elevated site, dedicating the church to St. John the Forerunner. His close communion with St. Nilus of Sora speaks of his affinity with the school of hesychasts and "mental activity."

St. Joseph of Volotsk (Volokolamsk) (1440-1515),[111] known as Ivan Sanin in secular life, was brought up in a monastery. At the age of twenty he came under the instruction of St. Paphnutius of Borovsk, who subsequently entrusted him with taking care of the sick. His own father was tonsured a monk and spent the last fifteen years of his life in the same monastery in the care of his son. Before his death, St. Paphnutius chose St. Joseph as his successor. However, when St. Joseph became the abbot and wished to introduce a coenobitic

109. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 296.
110. Commemorated October 2.
111. Commemorated September 9.

ST. JOSEPH OF VOLOTSK (VOLOKOLAMSK)

The main icon of him in the Volokolamsk Monastery.

way of life, he met with the brethren's displeasure. Then St. Joseph rejected the abbacy, and in the guise of a wandering monk began visiting many monastic communities and learning about their Rules. Upon his return he founded his own Volokolamsk monastery in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God. His Rule was notable for its strictness; but at the same time the Saint insisted on the necessity of monastic charity. This he realized on a grand scale during the famine which shortly ensued. St. Joseph spoke against the heresy of the Judaizers. In arguments with the defenders of "non-acquisitiveness," he stood for the necessity of monastic landowning for the sake of Church-State relationships.

St. Joseph of Volotsk was not a contemplative ascetic but a man of action, and the monastery he established was coenobitic. The average level of such monasteries was much lower than that of the sketes. The number of contemplative monks, in comparison with the overall number of monks, was very small. They were a select group – an aristocracy of the spirit. Such an elite group surrounded St. Nilus of Sora in a remote skete, where they had discourse on the lofty attainment of the spirit. St. Joseph of Volotsk was dealing with the general masses, who were on a comparatively low spiritual level. These masses needed spiritual incentives of a primitive nature. His exhortations emphasized the motive of reward after death, fear of eternal torments, charity for the sake of the salvation of one's soul. He himself strove to carry the tension of ascetic labor to an extreme limit. His main significance was in promoting social service.

"The entire world-view of St. Joseph," says Professor Florovsky, "was determined by the idea of social service and the mission of the Church. St. Joseph's ideal was to reach out to the people; and in his time there was a great need of this kind of concern. The moral principles of the people were not strong, and the burden of life was beyond their strength. It was characteristic of St. Joseph to regard and experience the monastic life itself as a kind of social duty, as a special kind of religious social service. His coenobitic ideal acquired many new, non-Byzantine features. With him, prayerful activity was subordinated from within to social service, to striving towards justice and mercy. He was a great man of charity, 'full of compassion for the weak'; and he defended monastery 'villages' precisely out of these philanthropic and social incentives. After all, he received such 'villages' from men of power and wealth in order to provide for and give to the poor and beggars. And not merely out of fear, not merely from a feeling of duty, but out of mercy, did St. Joseph practice charity, turning his monastery now into an orphanage, now into a refuge; or else establishing a place where wanderers were buried. St. Joseph included the Tsar himself in the same system of paying duties to God. Thus the Tsar was subject to the law; and only within the limits of God's law and commandments did he

have his own power. One should not obey an unjust or obstinate tsar, who then actually ceased being a tsar; he was no longer God's servant, but a demon and a tormentor. St. Joseph's ideas became pale and distorted in the next generations of 'Josephites.' An inherent danger lay hidden in the very ideas and works of St. Joseph themselves, and not only in their distortions and adaptations to a certain way of life. This danger lay in the overemphasis on social concern. Hence came a certain decline into primitivism – perhaps not from himself, but from the people – and a certain minimalism."[112]

St. Daniel of Pereyaslav (†1540)[113] practiced severe asceticism in his youth. He was tonsured a monk in Borovsk, and twelve years later returned to Pereyaslav, taking upon himself the service of burying those who died a sudden death. He founded his own monastery, which he designed similar to St. Joseph's and made dependent on the Moscow grand princes, called "tsars" in his written Life. Even the establishment of a new monastery was explained as following the Tsar's orders: "If the church will not be in the tsar's name, we shall not succeed but become impoverished."[114] When St. Daniel became old, Basil III appointed St. Daniel's successor and asked him to be the Godfather of his sons.

St. Gerasimus of Boldino (†1554),[115] a disciple of St. Daniel of Pereyaslav, left for the Smolensk region to live a hermit's life there. By heat and cold he restrained "the wild beast" – his body. He established four monasteries. His "Law," or testament, corresponds to the "Spiritual Deed" of St. Joseph of Volotsk. From the latter he borrowed also the institute of having twelve elders govern the monastery.

8. THE 16TH CENTURY

Russia in the 14th and 15th centuries proceeded under the sign of Byzantium: its influence was present in the rebirth of monasticism and the mystical *podvig* of contemplative life. Russia drew spiritual power and inspiration from communion with the East. Towards the end of the 15th century, however, these earlier ties became weak and were even severed.

As mentioned above, the occasion for the rupture with the Greek tradition was the Council of Florence and then the devastation of the Orthodox

112. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, pp. 18-19.
113. Commemorated April 7.
114. Fedotov, *The Saints of Ancient Russia*, p. 191.
115. Commemorated May 1.

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she was at the height of her calling and enjoyed the highest authority, to which the secular powers submitted themselves. But gradually a radical change took place: the influence of the Church waned along with the moral level of her representatives. She lost her predominant and leading position, yielding it to the secular power, which in the process of the unification of Russia became concentrated in the person of the Grand Prince of Moscow and grew in strength and self-sufficiency. The Josephite hierarchy, on the other hand, became weak in its endeavors to defend those who had fallen into disgrace and to expose injustice.[118] In those times of declining general spiritual level, people began to deviate from the truth of God. Just as in the days of ancient Israel, when prophets appeared accusing the people of deviating from piety, of violating their covenant with God, so too in Russia a new kind of sanctity became manifest – that of fools-for-Christ. It embodied in itself the fulness of divine truth; it was imbued with the spirit of prophecy and realized itself through complete rejection of the "world" and the exposure of evil in the world. Fools-for-Christ take upon themselves constant voluntary martyrdom, the task of an incessant struggle against their own nature, the world and the devil. Their path towards sanctity requires an extreme straining of their spiritual power, and may be realized only through exalted unceasing prayer. This particular ascetic practice came to us from the East, where it was associated with the names of St. Simeon in the 6th century and St. Andrew[119] at the end of the 10th century, and

118. From Metropolitan Peter (1308-1326) to Metropolitan Jonas (1448-1464), with the exception of the apostate Isidore, a whole series of metropolitans were canonized. In the hundred years from 1464 until the time of the holy martyr Philip II (1566-1569), none of the metropolitans were canonized. There were among them some respected personalities like Barlaam (1511-1521), who stood for the independence of the Church, or the famous Macarius (1542-1563), but many were distinguished by the negative aspects of their nature, as, for example, Metropolitan Gerontius (1472-1489), who was cruel and vindictive (he would make Archbishop Gennadius sit on ice) and displayed inertia with regard to the heresy of the Judaizers, according to St. Joseph of Volotsk, "either because of his rudeness or insolence, or for fear of the sovereign authority.' One should mention also Metropolitan Zosimas (1491-1494), who adhered to the heresy of the Judaizers, and, finally, the aforementioned Metropolitan Daniel (1522-1539), a career man who was not squeamish about the methods he employed.

119. St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ of Constantinople (880-946, commemorated October 2), who is depicted on icons of the Protection of the Mother of God, was a Slav by birth. In his youth he was sold into slavery in Greece. There he studied the Scriptures and other sciences. An unearthly youth called upon him to become a fool-for-Christ. His disciple Epiphanius and his friend and hagiographer Nicephorus were the only ones with whom St. Andrew communicated reasonably. Later on they testified that with the help of the Holy Spirit he was able to comment on any book, regardless of the language in which it was written, that he was endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and knowledge of the hearts of men, and that he was unusually eloquent. Sokolov, *The State of Monasticism in the Byzantine Church*, p. 345.

was considered one of the most unusual ascetic endeavors. In Russia this practice assumed a special task, that of serving the people, and it flourished in the 16th century. Professor Fedotov indicated the number of canonized fools-for-Christ by centuries as follows: 14th century – four fools-for-Christ; 15th century – eleven; 16th century – fourteen; 17th century – seven.

Blessed Maximus the Fool-for-Christ (†1433)[120] lived in the 15th century. He used to walk in the streets of Moscow, winter and summer, with almost no clothing on, teaching people by riddles, as for instance: "For enduring temptation, God will grant salvation"; "We all may cross ourselves this way – and yet not all may really pray." To merchants he would say: "A church to pray at home is nice – and yet the soul is bought for a price"; "According to your beard – like Abraham; according to your deeds – like Ham."

St. Arsenius the Fool-for-Christ of Novgorod (†1570)[121] was a tanner by trade and came from Rzhev. He founded a monastery in the commercial section of Novgorod, and spent the last years of his life as a recluse wearing chains on his body. On the 11th of July, as the city was being destroyed, Ivan the Terrible went to see him. The Saint severely accused the Tsar and implored him to stop the carnage. The same night, while standing on his knees in prayer, he reposed, and was found in this position the next morning.

Blessed Nicholas Salos (†1576),[122] labored as a fool-for-Christ in Pskov. After the destruction of Novgorod, when Ivan the Terrible was moving towards Pskov, the local Archbishop, the Governor Tokmakov, and Blessed Nicholas met to discuss the means of saving their city. God inspired them to arrange tables with bread and salt (a gesture of hospitality) in front of the houses and welcome the Tsar on their knees. Nicholas Salos offered the Tsar a piece of raw meat. "I am a Christian and do not eat meat during Great Lent," said the Tsar. "But you drink blood," answered the Fool-for-Christ, and continued: "Do not touch us, passer-by. Go, lest you not have any means of fleeing from here." The same night the Tsar's horse fell dead. Horrified, Ivan the Terrible left Pskov. Many townspeople were robbed, but no one was killed.

One must make note of yet another sad characteristic of the latter part of this period (the 16th - 17th centuries): the changing attitude of the people to the anchorites. Now the world no longer went after them, but rose up against

120. Commemorated November 11.

121. Commemorated July 12. In the early 1920's his relics were desecrated by Communists and were thrown into a pit which served as a garbage dump and outhouse. This was testified to by the future Archbishop Leonty of Chile after he went on a pilgrimage to the desecrated holy sites of Russia *(editor)*.

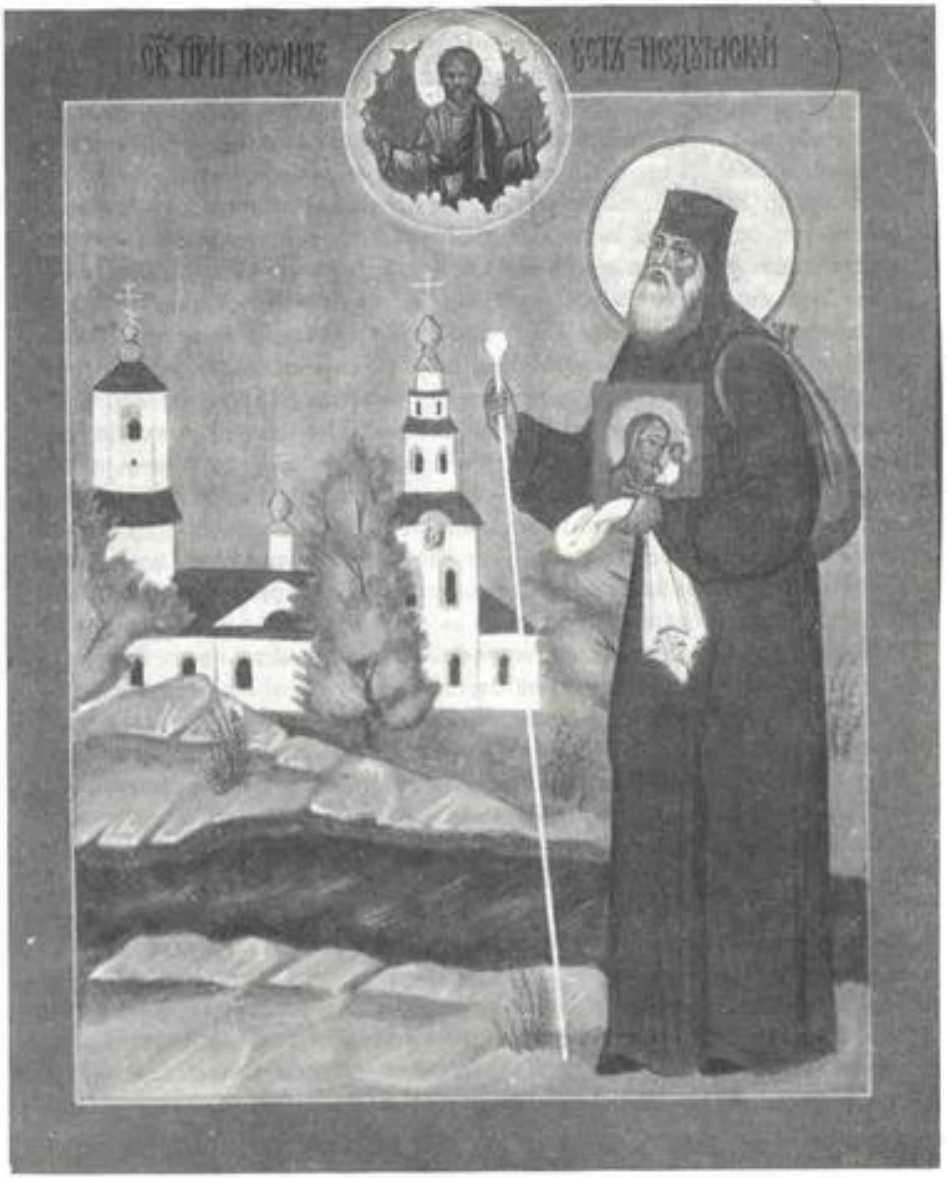
122. Commemorated February 28.

them. Monastery possessions grew larger and larger, and the peasants, fearing their own enslavement, considered the anchorites as their personal enemies, and sometimes even killed them. Two Saints named Adrian, **St. Adrian of Andrusov** (†1549)[123] and **St. Adrian of Poshekhonye** (†1550)[124] were killed with the aim of robbery. **St. Agapitus of Markushevo** (†1578)[125] was killed by peasants and his body thrown in a river. Before this, he had gone to Moscow to ask for a blessing from the Metropolitan and land from the Tsar for a mill; at this mill he was killed. Further, **St. Simon of Volomsk** (†1641)[126] was martyrically killed by peasants. The same fate befell **St. Job the Gorge-dweller** (†1628).[127] **St. Nilus of Stolbensk** (†1554)[128] was saved from the midst of a forest which had been set on fire around him. By chance, St. Arsenius of Komel (†1557) was saved when his disciple was mistaken for him and killed. St. Diodorus of George Hill (†1624) was driven away and beaten. Finally, **St. Leonid of Ustnedumsk** (†1654),[129] likewise banished, had to move his monastery from a mountain to a swamp.

9. ST. CORNELIUS OF KOMEL (†1537)[130]

St. Cornelius was the son of a Rostov boyar, Theodore Kriukov. After severe ascetic labors in the White Lake Monastery, where he wore chains, he travelled to Rostov to see his younger brother in order to dedicate him to monasticism. Thereafter the Saint undertook the life of a pilgrim. He arrived in Novgorod, where Archbishop Gennadius showed him high respect. He fled from fame: first to the St. Sabbatius Monastery in Tver, and later to the forest of Komel. Once he happened to be in Moscow, where Metropolitan Simon ordained him a priest. Soon afterwards he went to live in the forest as a hermit, and for nineteen years was exposed to threats by evil people and thieves. Only at the age of sixty did he build a church dedicated to the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple, and founded a monastery. Almost in every Life of the northern saints we observe the same pattern: as soon as one of God's chosen monks completes external ascetic labors and matures to the life of

123. Commemorated August 26, He was originally a monk of Valaam Monastery *(editor)*.
124. Commemorated March 5.
125. Commemorated May 21.
126. Commemorated July 12.
127. Commemorated August 6.
128. Commemorated December 7 and May 27.
129. Commemorated July 17.
130. Commemorated May 19.



ST. LEONID OF USTNEDUMSK

A contemporary icon by N. G. Emilianova.

silence, he receives a blessing from his abbot or elder and settles in a remote forest. Like a swimmer who throws himself into the boundless sea, he plunges into the abyss of dangers and sorrows accompanying the solitary life in the wilderness. This is possible only in the presence of a fullness of faith and a total submission to God's Providence. Then, having gone through the school of inward perfection, he again enters into communion with men. But at the first opportunity, he again strives and thirsts to continue his silence. The same pattern may be observed in the Life of St. Cornelius: having established his first monastic community, he went away to Lake Sura with his disciple Gennadius. There was also an external reason for the Saint's departure — an offense committed by the monastery's brethren. The Saint's solitary life, however, did not continue for very long: Grand Prince Basil Ioannovich, following an appeal from the brethren, forced him to return to the monastery, granting land to the latter. St. Cornelius, being a true monastic of White Lake, "did not wish to ask for anything, except for some land with a forest near the monastery, so that they could eat their bread by the sweat of their brow."[131] The biographer says that the Saint "intended to feed himself and those with him by the work of their hands," at the same time "receiving and feeding visitors and passers-by."[132] St. Cornelius himself would distribute alms on feast days "without looking into faces, but extending his hand to those in need." Some people would abuse the Saint's good will and come back for more alms, up to five times. The monks drew the Saint's attention to the behavior of such beggars, saying that "some came back for a second time, and some received alms five times." The Saint said: "Do not do anything to them: that is what they came for." That night the Saint had a vision of St. Anthony the Great, who "began to fill his gathered garment with *prosphoras* and bread to overflowing. Then Cornelius told us about it with tears in his eyes and bade us to be charitable not only in his lifetime but after his death as well."[133]

Having returned to his monastery for the second time after leaving it for Lake Sura, the Saint "felled trees and sowed fields, not merely so that they might eat their own bread, but so that they also might feed those that had none." His Life records the Saint's exhortations on the preserving of purity, on "mental prayer," self-control and the battle with passions. Especially did the Saint insist on the two highest commandments of the Gospel: love of God and neighbor. "This Gospel teaching," says Kadlubovsky, "formed the basis

131. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 299.
132. *Ibid.*
133. *Ibid.*

of his moral world-view."[134] St. Cornelius practiced the labor of eldership for the sake of love: "By the grace of God he would bless and console those who came to him with faith."[135] *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some* (I Cor. 9:22), one reads in his Life, where these words of the Apostle Paul testify to the Saint's practice of eldership. As we have seen before, this verse was often used when characterizing holy elders. Professor Smirnov describes the Saint's activity during a famine: "The Vologda land suffered famine. Bread became very expensive, and it could not be bought anywhere. Wanderers and beggars would come to Cornelius' monastery from many areas, and many starving people from nearby. The Saint refused no one, and daily distributed generous alms. Many would bring their infants and leave them at the monastery walls. The Saint welcomed them all and directed them to a special refuge where they were given food and shelter. The monastery supplies did not grow scarce in those difficult times. The monastery rule adopted by St. Cornelius considered charity to be binding on the monastery. Forbidding self-willed acts of charity by individual monks in order not to violate the strictness of communal life, St. Cornelius ordered that everything acquired by the working monks be taken to the treasury: 'neither should they give alms,' 'for in the monastery, charity and love for the poor are the common task.' "[136]

"The Life of St. Cornelius, written in 1589 by Monk Nathaniel, who knew the Saint personally, is regarded by V. O. Kliuchevsky to be among the best works of hagiography. Konoplev sets its worth as a historical document even higher."[137]

St. Cornelius was a contemporary of St. Nilus of Sora. There are no indications that the two ascetics ever met or communicated, and therefore it is impossible to establish whether St. Cornelius was influenced by St. Nilus. However, it is beyond doubt that both adhered to the Greek hesychast school. As stated by his biographer, St. Cornelius taught: "Guard the heart through mental prayer from evil thoughts as much as possible. . . ."[138] These words, expressing the essence of hesychasm, show that St. Cornelius and his disciples practiced "mental prayer." These words of the Saint's biographer, disciple, and sharer of his monastic mystery (*sotainnik*), acquire indisputable historical authenticity. The scholarly value of the Saint's Life has been noted above.

134. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
136. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*. pp. 59-61.
137. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 297.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

Professor Kadlubovsky says: "The influence of Mt. Athos and the southern Slavs upon Russian life of the 14th and 15th centuries has been sufficiently ascertained. Thus, the impact of Mt. Athos and Greek asceticism experienced by St. Nilus had been experienced by other Russians as well; and therefore it did not tear St. Nilus away from Russian life, where the stream of his influence was felt."[139] The general influence of Byzantinism explains the similarity between the character of the asceticism of St. Nilus and St. Cornelius – namely, their inward spiritual activity.

There are five known disciples of St. Cornelius:

1. **St. Gennadius of Kostroma** (†1565)[140] accompanied St. Cornelius into the wild forest on Lake Sura, where together they founded a monastery. St. Gennadius remained there after St. Cornelius returned to his first monastery. He became known as a diligent ascetic who contributed greatly to the newly-founded monastery; he also healed Bishop Cyprian of Vologda. "The grace of the Holy Trinity rested upon him," as is stated in his Life.

2. Another disciple of St. Cornelius, **St. Herodion of Iloe Lake** (†1541),[141] departed to White Lake upon St. Cornelius' death. An angel guided him to a site where he commanded him to build a church in the name of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos. St. Herodion spent three years in silence. An angel told him of his imminent repose. A monastic community was established after the Saint's death.

3. The third disciple, **St. Philip of Irap** (1537),[142] left the monastery for a "solitary life in silence." He dug a cave in the river bank for his dwelling, and built a little chapel where he could offer prayers to the Lord for his salvation. He spent fifteen years in strict isolation; and only because of bad health did he live with a companion for the five years preceding his repose. People soon learned of the place of his ascetic labors, and crowds began gathering around him and asking for his instructions and prayers. The chapel was transformed into a church, his cave into a cell. The Saint would instruct lay people in virtues by which they were to live in the world. Condemning family discords, he preached love of peace, love of parents towards children and respect of children towards parents. Reproaching hardness of heart, he prescribed a kind disposition towards the poor and the sick, as the Lord God Himself has taught. He regarded monasticism as more glorious than earthly kingdoms, because

139. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
140. Commemorated January 23.
141. Commemorated September 28.
142. Commemorated November 14.

ST. ALEXANDER OF SVIR

An ancient icon painted from his incorrupt relics, which were desecrated and burned by Communists in 1918. From the collection of Valaam Monastery.

monastics could attain the glory of angels. "But the yoke of monastic life is severe and filled with sorrows," and not many take it upon themselves. St. Philip regarded three main virtues as being indispensable for a monk: "non-acquisitiveness, much fasting and much vigilance." "We have destroyed the angelic life; we eat and drink abundantly, we dress well, but we are unable to fast and to attain the wisdom of humility." "Nowadays we are filled with a desire to acquire things, with high-mindedness, greed and pride."[143]

4. **St. Cyril of New Lake** (†1532)[144] was the fourth disciple of St. Cornelius of Komel. Before he was born, his mother heard his voice in the church exclaiming: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth." St. Cyril began his monastic life under the guidance of St. Cornelius in the latter's monastery. St. Cyril's spiritual maturity was acknowledged by all the brethren. Desirous of life in the wilderness, he went north, towards the ocean, and wandered along the coast. A voice from above directed him towards White Lake, where he founded a monastic community on Beautiful Island, on the eastern side of New Lake. St. Cyril erected buildings with his own hands, felled trees, ploughed the land and planted vegetables. Grand Prince Basil Ioannovich granted two villages to his monastery. On behalf of **St. Alexander of Svir**[145] he was visited by St. Nicephorus of Vazhe Lake. When reading the Akathist to the Mother of God, St. Cyril sensed the arrival of a visitor. Having finished praying, he took a boat across the lake, and there on the northern side he saw a traveller asleep on a rock. A powerful light was streaming from heaven, which awoke the sleeping man. St. Cyril erected a cross to mark the place of this encounter. He is known to have shown clairvoyance and healed the sick on countless occasions. His fellow-ascetic Dionysius saw an angel serving together with the Saint. "My son Dionysius," said St. Cyril, "do not probe into God's ways, and until my passing away to God do not tell anyone what has been revealed to you by the Lord, the Giver of spiritual joy." Once the Saint appeared in sleep to a seriously ill benefactor of the monastery and invited him to come and see him and thus be healed. When the ailing Prince Penkov arrived at the New Lake Monastery, St. Cyril, barefoot and dressed in rags, was celebrating Liturgy in an unheated church. It was so cold that no one could attend the service. After the Liturgy, the Saint offered holy water to the Prince, whereupon the latter regained his health. During the last hours before his death, St. Cyril had a revelation of the approaching disaster of the Time of Troubles: "Great misfortune has befallen

143. Smirnov, *How the Ascetics of Ancient Russia Served the World*, p. 66.
144. Commemorated February 4.
145. †1533, commemorated August 30.

ST. CYRIL OF NEW LAKE
A 17th-century icon.

our land, and great is God's anger upon its people." Elder Daniel asked the Saint to reveal what was to follow. . . . "God will grant peace to our country and order will be established in it. As to you, my brethren and fathers, pray with tears to God and His Most Pure Mother for the state of the Russian land." Here we see a feature characteristic of Russian saints – their love for their native land.

5. Finally, the fifth disciple of St. Cornelius was **St. Adrian of Poshekhonye** (†1550).[146] One day a radiant, mysterious elder, having called himself the "Lowly One," led St. Adrian and another monk Leonid away from the monastery of St. Cornelius into the wild, impenetrable forest in the territory of Poshekhonye, and then became invisible. In 1543, with the blessing of Metropolitan Macarius, they laid the foundations of a church. Monks began gathering around them. Seven years later St. Adrian was killed by outlaws. A certain Sidor secretly buried the remains of the martyr and planted a rowan tree on his grave. It acquired healing properties. Only in 1626 did people learn about the hidden relics. Instances of miraculous healing followed.

St. Theodosius of Totma (†1568)[147] left the Priluki Monastery and settled deep in the forest on the river Totma, where a monastic community was soon formed. He used to collect books. Being a strict ascetic, he used to wear a hair-shirt and a body chain.

St. Anthony of Siya (†1556)[148] was tonsured a monk by **St. Pachomius of Keno** (†c. 1515),[149] who became his guide and took him to live in his hermitage. When St. Anthony was ordained a priest, the abbot blessed him to embrace the life of a hermit. He wandered in the forest wilderness with four fellow-ascetics. In 1520 he founded the Siya Monastery near the [White] Sea. After a short period of abbacy in the monastery, he departed to an island to live there in complete silence. Having attained a state of grace and received the gift of clairvoyance, he returned to his monastery and resumed the duties of abbot. These are the external facts of his life.

St. Anthony was one of the many saints who looked upon St. Cyril of White Lake and his testament as a model worthy of emulation. Even St. Anthony's spiritual instructions are copied from those of St. Cyril, with a few added exhortations. Kadlubovsky notes that this fact points to a spiritual bond between northern monastics and St. Cyril.[150] St. Anthony, who followed St.

146. Commemorated March 5.
147. Commemorated January 28.
148. Commemorated December 7. St. Anthony was an outstanding iconographer *(editor)*.
149. Commemorated on the first Saturday after Epiphany.
150. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 320.

Cyril of White Lake and the ascetic practice of the Northern Thebaid, adhered to the hesychast school of sobriety; and this circumstance is emphasized in his Life which mentions the "inward activity (of the Jesus Prayer)" that he practiced with "all diligence." For the sake of silence and contemplation he departed to a desert island. There, living in great silence, he joyfully strove towards the highest, and removing his mind from all cares he talked to God in the purity of mind and heart, letting his prayers rise to heaven like incense."[151] In his spiritual instructions, the Saint admonished to pray for the Tsar and his family; he gave some quite definite instructions on monastic life, admonishing monks "to keep the fear of God in their hearts, to try to become a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who will then show the true path. Have love for one another and obedience in Christ, so that your many sins may be covered."[152] He impressed upon the future Abbot of the monastery, Cyril, to be humble and meek: "do not be violent to those in your care, but punish with meekness those that sin, and be watchful lest you too be tempted by a certain sin." St. Anthony added a few instructions regarding concern for the brethren: to seek the counsel of all, to care for the sick and visit them.[153] All instructions, words and facts recorded in the Saint's Life bear witness to the depth of the Gospel teaching with which he was imbued. Like other saints of St. Cyril's school, he was characterized by non-acquisitiveness. In his Life we read: ". . . He struggled greatly. . . laboring for God, eating wild-growing grasses of this desert and by his labor providing whatever he and his brethren needed."[154] He advised Monk Philotheus: "Learn handicraft and at all times work with your hands." Kadlubovsky notes that St. Anthony was inclined "to that aspect of hermitic life which required silence, solitude and non-acquisitiveness. Acquisition of land in his lifetime may be explained in the same manner as similar facts in the life of St. Cyril of White Lake and St. Dionysius of Glushetsk."[155]

St. Arsenius of Komel (†1557)[156] came from the boyar family of the Sukhorukovs. He began his monastic life in the Holy Trinity Lavra and subsequently was its abbot. Striving for silence, the Saint went first to the Komel forest, from where he was driven out by local people who had killed his disciple. Then he spent some time in the Shelegod forest. However, in order to avoid the many people who came to live in his wilderness (later known as Alexandro-Korovino), he once again returned to the Komel forest; and oblivious

151. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
155. *Ibid.*, p. 322.
156. Commemorated August 24.

of the evil he suffered there "he would walk along the fields and talk about spiritual matters to people working there, teaching them how to attain the salvation of their souls, how to keep God's commandments and heed the instructions of the Holy Fathers, and how to avoid worldly concerns on God's holy days."[157] In Count Uvarov's manuscript (no. 1247), the text of the Saint's Life is accompanied by illustrations, some of which depict peasants working in a field and the Saint in monastic garb sitting nearby and conducting a spiritual conversation. "In conclusion it should be acknowledged," says Kadlubovsky, "that the Life of St. Arsenius of Komel reflects his meek condescension to people, that the sermon of love is prominent in it, standing out in exhortations ascribed to the Saint, and that the biographer has left external manifestations of piety unmentioned."[158]

St. Alexander of Svir (†1533)[159] was tonsured a monk in Valaam Monastery and founded a monastery near the river Svir. His disciples, hesychasts, were **Sts. Nicephorus and Gennadius of Vazhe Lake** (†1550),[160] who also established monastic communities.

St. Nilus of Stolbensk (†1554)[161] began his monastic life in Krypets Monastery [Pskov], and later practiced asceticism on the river Cheremkha in the Rzhevsk forest, his food being grass and acorns. Following the calling of God, he departed to Stolbensk Island on Lake Seliger. There he suffered from threats and evil people who set fire to the forest in order to kill him. He healed thieves who were punished by blindness for their intention to attack him. Being endowed with the gift of foresight into human affairs, he would direct sinners onto the path of righteousness. He died while standing on crutches, on which he used to rest instead of lying in bed.

St. Martyrius of Zelenetsk [Pskov] (†1603)[162] was an ascetic in the Monastery of the Great Meadows (Veliki Luki), and lived in the same cell with Elder Bogolep. They ate once a day. After the church service and the reading of all the prayer rules, they would recite the Jesus Prayer 1000 times, a prayer to the Holy Theotokos 200 times, and make 600 prostrations. Most of the night they spent milling corn. After many miraculous signs, St. Martyrius went to Green Island (Zelenetsk), amidst impenetrable swamps, where he founded a monastic community. As recorded in the Obonega books, by 1582 St. Martyrius was already an abbot and had twelve brethren in his community. The first

157. Kadlubovsky, *Essays on the Lives of Saints*, p. 308.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
159. Commemorated August 3.
160. Commemorated February 9.
161. Commemorated December 7.
162. Commemorated March 1.

THE MONASTERY OF ST. ARSENIUS OF KOMEL

Clockwise from top: the Brotherhood living quarters; the cross that belonged to St. Arsenius; the reliquary over his grave; and the icon of the Theotokos that he brought to his monastery. *From* Russian Pilgrim, *1905.*

benefactor of this community was Theodore Syrkov, later martyred by Ivan the Terrible in 1570. Another benefactor was the Tsar of Kasim, Simeon Bekbulatov [a former pagan], who was grateful to the Saint for healing his son. Finally, Tsar Theodore Ioannovich donated land and some rich fisheries to the monastery. St. Martyrius was a saint of the contemplative type, but the century of the non-acquisitors was already in the past.

St. Longinus of Koryazhemsk (†1547)[163] was a hesychast.

St. Therapontes of Monza (†1597)[164] kept his time and place of birth secret. He was tonsured a monk in the Ascension Monastery in Kostroma, and quickly went through the stages of monastic perfection. Military personnel, clerics and people of all ranks, great and small, came to see him. He did not receive them all equally: some he accused of their vices. Wishing to flee fame and popularity, he went into hiding in the remote Annunciation Monastery on the estuary of the Monza River, where he spent the last three years of his life. According to his Life, he was a practicing elder of the then-developing monastic community. The neighboring boyar Nelidov tried to destroy it; and the Obnora Monastery situated in the vicinity tried to subject it to itself and even confiscated church books of the community. During this period of sorrows, Elder Therapontes was like a guardian angel of the oppressed. Descriptions of these circumstances, as well as the Saint's activity as an elder during his last three years, form the contents of his Life.

St. Maximus the Greek (†1556)[165] was a highly educated representative of Eastern enlightenment, a native of the city of Arta (Epirus). He was named Michael Travlis in the world, and was born in 1470 (according to the most recent research by E. Denisov). He studied and worked in Venice, Ferrara, Padua, and Florence. As a philosopher, he was Platonic. Being endowed with a sense for the beautiful, he had leanings towards poetry; and later he was the first to draw the attention of Russians to rules of versification, "measured speech," to the trochee and iamb.[166] In Venice, he participated in publishing the writings of Greek philosophers, undertaken by Aldo Manuchi, and in Florence – in translating Patristic literature into Latin, the enterprise of Pica de Mirandola.[167] This was the period of the Italian Renaissance, when a general interest in paganism predominated. As a youth, Michael Travlis was a child of his age. But at the age of eighteen, and even earlier, when listening to I. Savonarola's (†1498) sermons directed against the dissoluteness of morals, which had such a startling impact on his fellow-citizens, the young Michael found himself among Savonarola's fervent admirers. The impression made upon him by Savonarola was so strong and indelible that it left its mark on his consciousness for the rest of his life. "I would gladly compare them with the ancient defenders of piety, if they were not Latins,"[168] St. Maximus would say when already in Russia, remembering the martyrdom of Savonarola and his two companions. Around 1507, he went to Mt. Athos and joined the Vatopedi Monastery. In 1515, Basil III invited him to come to Moscow to translate sacred books. At the same time, St. Maximus wrote books on dogmatics, grammar, philosophy and history, and conducted warfare with ignorance and superstition. He opposed Tsar Basil III's divorce and illegitimate marriage, and spoke out against monastic landowning. His expositions gained him many enemies, and after a pettifogging and prejudiced trial "he suffered from heavy fetters and imprisonment for many years" (Kurbsky). However, despite twenty-five years of persecution, St. Maximus' moral aura remained untarnished in the eyes of his best contemporaries. Metropolitan Macarius himself wrote to him: "We kiss your bonds, as we would those of a saint, but we are unable to offer you any help." St. Maximus was unacceptable to those around him because he went against the spirit of the period of decay and the preponderance of matters external. In the name of the Savior, St. Maximus addressed his contemporaries with the following words: "It was not for sonorous bells, hymns and precious myrrh that I came down to earth and assumed your form; everything under the sun is Mine and the fullness thereof. I willed that books be written containing My commandments and instructions intended for your salvation, that you might learn to please Me. Yet you lavishly adorn the book of My words with silver and gold both outside and inside, but you do not accept the power of My commandments contained in it, and not only do you not keep them, you go against them."[169]

The best and most enlightened men of that time grouped themselves around St. Maximus; there were many of them at the beginning of Ivan IV's reign. Sylvester and Adashev, Archbishop Herman of Kazan (of the princes of the Smolensk family), who refused to be Metropolitan of Moscow, V. Tuchkov, who wrote the Life of St. Michael of Klop, and many others were in the sphere of his influence. Having destroyed Russian life and culture, Ivan the Terrible did not allow the seeds planted by the hand of St. Maximus to sprout in full measure. However, his faithful disciples, Abbot Artemius and Kurbsky, who

163. Commemorated February 10.
164. Commemorated December 12.
165. Commemorated January 21.
166. Ikonnikov, Vol. I *(Maximus the Greek and His Time)* (Kiev, 1915), p. 187.
167. E. Denisov, *Maxime le Grec* (Paris-Brussels, 1943), p. 233.

168. Pypin, *The History of Russian Literature* (St. Petersburg, 1902), p. 102.
169. Ikonnikov, Vol. I, p. 503.

ST. MICHAEL OF KLOP

A 17th-century icon depicting scenes from his life.

managed to flee to the West, accomplished a great deal for Russian enlightenment and the defense of Orthodoxy. Kurbsky mastered Latin in order to translate into Slavonic the writings of Holy Fathers which St. Maximus had recommended. St. Maximus' influence is obvious in the Acts of the Stoglav Council and in the Code of Law of Ivan the Terrible,[170] as well as in the enlightening works of Metropolitan Macarius. This influence may be likened to the luminous tail of a meteor that passed over the spiritual horizon of the Russian sky, according to the words of the Historian Denisov.

The spiritual image of St. Maximus the Greek was bound with Mt. Athos. A contemporary Muscovite aptly called him "St. Maximus the New Confessor." In his works, St. Maximus the Greek touched upon Orthodox asceticism as it was understood by the Holy Fathers. He defined man as: "Dust and ashes mixed with a small amount of water, but preserving within himself the divine spirit, just like a shell keeping a pearl within itself." St. Maximus commented on spiritual visions: "O my soul, being my very life and my thought, thou art endowed with immortality and therefore thou canst know thy Primary Source, Whose image thou dost carry within thyself." "External beauty of the body is deceptive and transitory; it is an obstacle to acquiring spiritual beauty." And St. Maximus added: "Let us fervently strive to acquire God-like beauty. . . ." "We must emulate the nature of the six-winged angels." St. Maximus spoke of the divine inspiration of the Holy Fathers, to whom God revealed the hidden meaning of sacred texts, and who were granted the gift of unearthing their mysterious meaning with the help of "spiritual spades." During the last years of his life, St. Maximus said of himself in a letter addressed to Metropolitan Macarius: "I was instructed and strengthened by the grace of the worshipped Divine Paraclete (the Holy Spirit)." On the walls of his prison, St. Maximus wrote with a piece of charcoal a Canon to the Holy Spirit, just as the imprisoned Savonarola in his time had also written in prison a prayerful address to the Holy Spirit. But with the latter it came out as the poetic cry of a tormented soul, while the Canon of St. Maximus was merely the humble prayerful petition of a Byzantine monk.[171]

St. Cornelius, Abbot of Pskov Caves Monastery [Hieromartyr] (†1570),[172] In his Life one reads: "The name of St. Cornelius, a zealous abbot, a severe

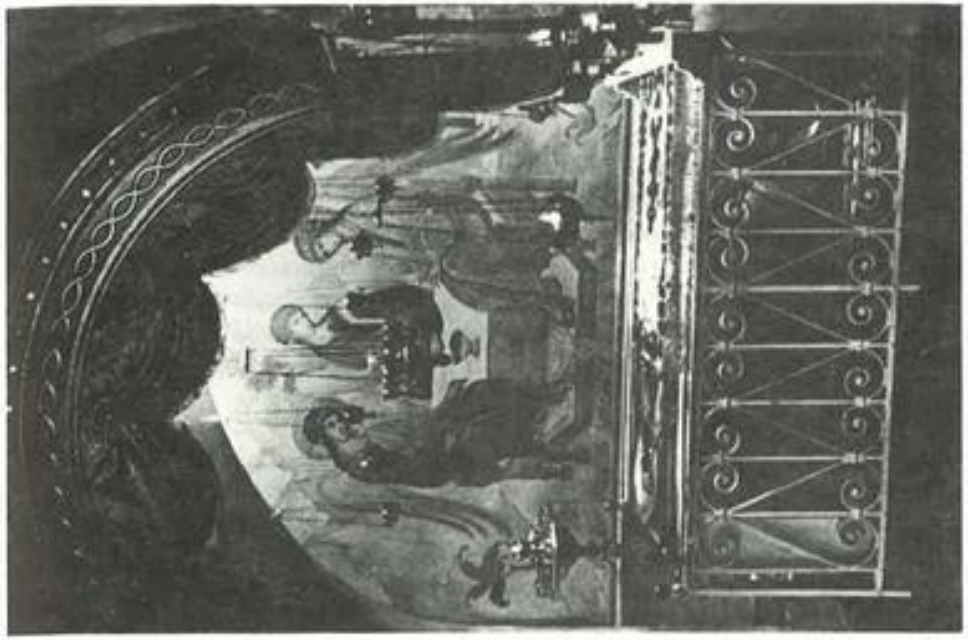
170. See the research of I. V. Belyaev (in *Russian Converser*, 1858, Vol. IV) and also I. N. Zhdanov, "Materials for the History of the Stoglav Council," in *Journal for Russian Enlightenment*, 1876, nos. 7 and 8.

171. See Ikonnikov, Vol. I, p.573. St. Maximus' sayings are from E. Denisov, *Maxime le Grec*, pp. 305-320.

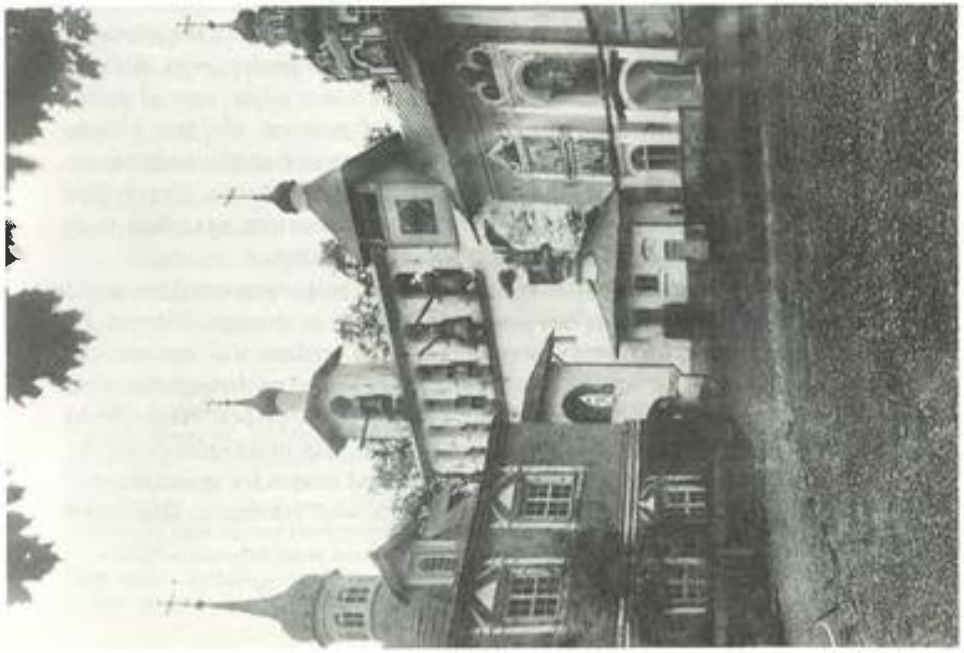
172. Commemorated February 20.

ST. CORNELIUS, HIEROMARTYR OF PSKOV

A contemporary icon painted in Pskov, now located at the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California.



The reliquary of St. Cornelius in the Monastery.



The Pskov Caves Monastery in 1939.

ascetic and an enlightened man, was known all over Russia in his lifetime. A learned man, Abbot Artemius, would come to visit him. He tonsured Bassian Muromtsev, Kurbsky's disciple. Prince Kurbsky also was his frequent visitor." The Saint could not be considered a contemplative type of monk: he was a severe ascetic and martyr. In long-lost writings are enumerated the many misfortunes imposed upon the Russian land by Ivan the Terrible: "Revolts and disorder in the Russian land, division of the country, sedition, death, resettlement of people, confiscation of estates, great fires in cities, pestilence, famine and incursion of foreign forces." The martyric death of the Saint followed in the 69th year of his life [he was beheaded by Ivan the Terrible]. "From this corruptible earthly life, by the Terrible Tsar he was sent to the Heavenly Tsar, to eternal abodes."

St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow [Hieromartyr] (†1569)[173] was an imposing figure of the 16th century, a martyr and confessor of the Truth of Christ. "Metropolitan Philip's spiritual heroism enhanced the pastoral service of two holy men in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow: St. Alexius and St. Hermogenes. One of these hierarchs dedicated his life's works to the consolidation of the State of Moscow, while the other sacrificed life itself in defending the State against its external enemies. St. Philip gave his life when struggling with this State in the person of the Tsar, thus demonstrating that it, too, must submit to the highest principle of life."[174] Such was the meaning of his sacrifice. From the point of view of the present work, we are interested in the obscured aspects of his personality, namely, his life of silence and contemplation. Without inner spiritual grounding, the Saint would not have had a bright aura of purity about him. Here we do not see the domination of passions. No. Not a single dissonance could be found in him. In this he was different than Patriarch Nicon, who also suffered while defending the independence of the Church. History presents the latter as a man possessing weaknesses and shortcomings which were partially to blame for his mishaps. . . . St. Philip was different.

Theodore Kolychev, the future Metropolitan Philip, renounced the world along with his position at the Tsar's court in Moscow at the age of thirty. He arrived at the Solovki Monastery around 1538. "Theodore did not wish to reveal his secular standing for the sake of humility, and went through the usual severe monastic labors: 'He chopped wood, dug soil in the garden, carried rocks and manure on his shoulders.' He would endure trials even more arduous for the sake of humility: 'Many times he was humiliated and beaten by ignorant men,' but did not become angry, enduring these insults with meekness. One and a

173. Commemorated January 9, July 3 and October 5.

174. Fedotov, *St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow* (Paris, 1928), p. 9.

half years later he was tonsured a monk with the name of Philip. But 'the angelic rank did not free him from heavy work. His work of obedience was first in the kitchen, then in the bakery; he chopped wood, carried water, heated stoves. During those years he was in obedience to Hieromonk Jonah, a "wonderful elder" who in his youth was a disciple of the then well-known St. Alexander of Svir. Jonah instructed St. Philip in the ways of monastic life and church rules. When his pupil mastered the liturgical science, he was appointed ecclesiarch and had to supervise the order of church services.' "[175] St. Philip loved his elder all his life, and wished to rest next to him after death. When the Transfiguration Cathedral was being built, he dug his own grave next to the grave for his elder, into which was placed, "in the year 7076 (1568) Monk Jonah Shamin" – his elder. Having completed external asceticism, Monk Philip entered the next stage of spiritual life – contemplative *podvig*. He departed to the forest wilderness "where he raised his mind to God and exercised himself in prayers." The hermit spent "not a few years" in this seclusion. Then he resumed the usual monastic labors. The aging Abbot wished St. Philip to take up the burden of his duties. In 1548, St. Philip was ordained a priest in Novgorod and raised to the rank of abbot. However, upon his return he did not replace the former Abbot right away, but went into reclusion.[176] This was to help him, before he began his outward service, to attain complete inward concentration, similar to how Christ spent forty days in the desert before coming out to preach. We know that the life of silence enables ascetics to control all their senses. Being thus armed, St. Philip was now forced to assume the difficult duties when the elderly Abbot passed away. Having become an administrator, the humble desert-dweller unexpectedly revealed the qualities of a genius, which until then had lain hidden within him. All of his eighteen-year-long term as an abbot bears witness to his talented nature. It is impossible in a few words to describe the extent of his tireless activity. We may only briefly mention the erection of huge stone churches, hospitals and other buildings; the building of hermitages in forests, lighthouses on sea shores, metochia in Novgorod and Vologda; the clearing of forests to make way for fields; the proper managing of forests; the

175. *Ibid.*, p. 60-61.

176. Professor Fedotov characterizes St. Philip as follows: "Before us there stands not a strong character, not an ambitious man of action who knows the extent of his power and responsibility, but rather a man of timid nature striving to evade authority. . . . He is not a fighter, but rather a fugitive" (pp. 65-66). However, the epithet of an "ambitious man of action" may not at all be applied to the concept of a saint, because all inward activity consists of fighting and eradicating the passions, including that of ambition. This is the more so because a contemplative ascetic at the first opportunity must avoid any external activity. Such ascetic endeavor (*podvig*) requires an unusually strong and courageous nature. This is what we see in Metropolitan Philip's entire life and in his martyric death.

breeding of cattle and reindeer; huge hydrotechnical works which drew admiration; various workshops; business enterprises; salt-works; as well as the management of large land properties. Abbot Philip would interrupt this manifold creative activity by departing into the wilderness to pray. In 1566 the Tsar summoned him to Moscow, where "a white *klobuk* [the hat of a metropolitan] and a martyr's crown" were awaiting him. The selflessness and strong will which distinguished St. Philip during the period of his abbacy characterized him until the very end of his heroic life. In the course of events his spiritual make-up grew stronger. Metropolitan Philip never stopped remonstrating with Ivan the Terrible, privately and publicly, manifesting exceptional courage and being fully aware that with his every word against the Tsar's actions and *Oprichnina* (secret police) he was signing his own death sentence. The rest we know from history.

The following characteristic incident bears witness to the degree of perfection attained by the hierarch. Kurbsky recounts: "Indeed I heard this from an eyewitness, who said that fetters fell off his feet, and a hungry bear did not dare to harm him . . . he was found safe and sound standing in prayer while the beast, like a meek lamb, was lying in a corner." We have often encountered such victory over creatures in the Lives of contemplative mystics who attained dispassion. St. Isaac the Syrian explains this phenomenon as follows: "Humility of wisdom is like a vestment of Divinity. Therefore all creatures, rational and irrational, when looking upon any man thus attired in humility of wisdom, submit to him as to their master, thus honoring their Creator, in Whose likeness the man is clothed, and Who dwells in him."[177]

We should mention here one detail which has remained unrecorded by history and which deals with Metropolitan Philip's last hours. Fr. Alexius, the senior parish priest, and Reader Laurence, both from the estate of the Metropolitan's sister, came to see the holy prisoner on the eve of his death to convey everyone's love for him. When bidding them farewell, the Metropolitan blessed them and their descendants until the Last Judgment, at the same time foretelling to them that they themselves would, however, not survive the next day. His words came true. In the Chronicle of the Otroch Monastery in Tver there is the following entry: A priest of God [*i.e.*, Fr. Alexius] was beheaded, and a Reader [Laurence] "was beaten up with sticks and hanged." A few centuries later the descendants of these martyrs, the families of Petropavlovsky and Vytchikov, joined into one. And this doubly-blessed branch produced many people of the Church, strong in spirit. It was due to them and other servants of God like them, unknown to "the world," that Holy Russia stood strong.[178]

177. *Writings of St. Isaac the Syrian* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1898), pp. 234-235.
178. From the notes of E. A. V., a woman descendant of this family.

10. ANCIENT RUSSIAN ART

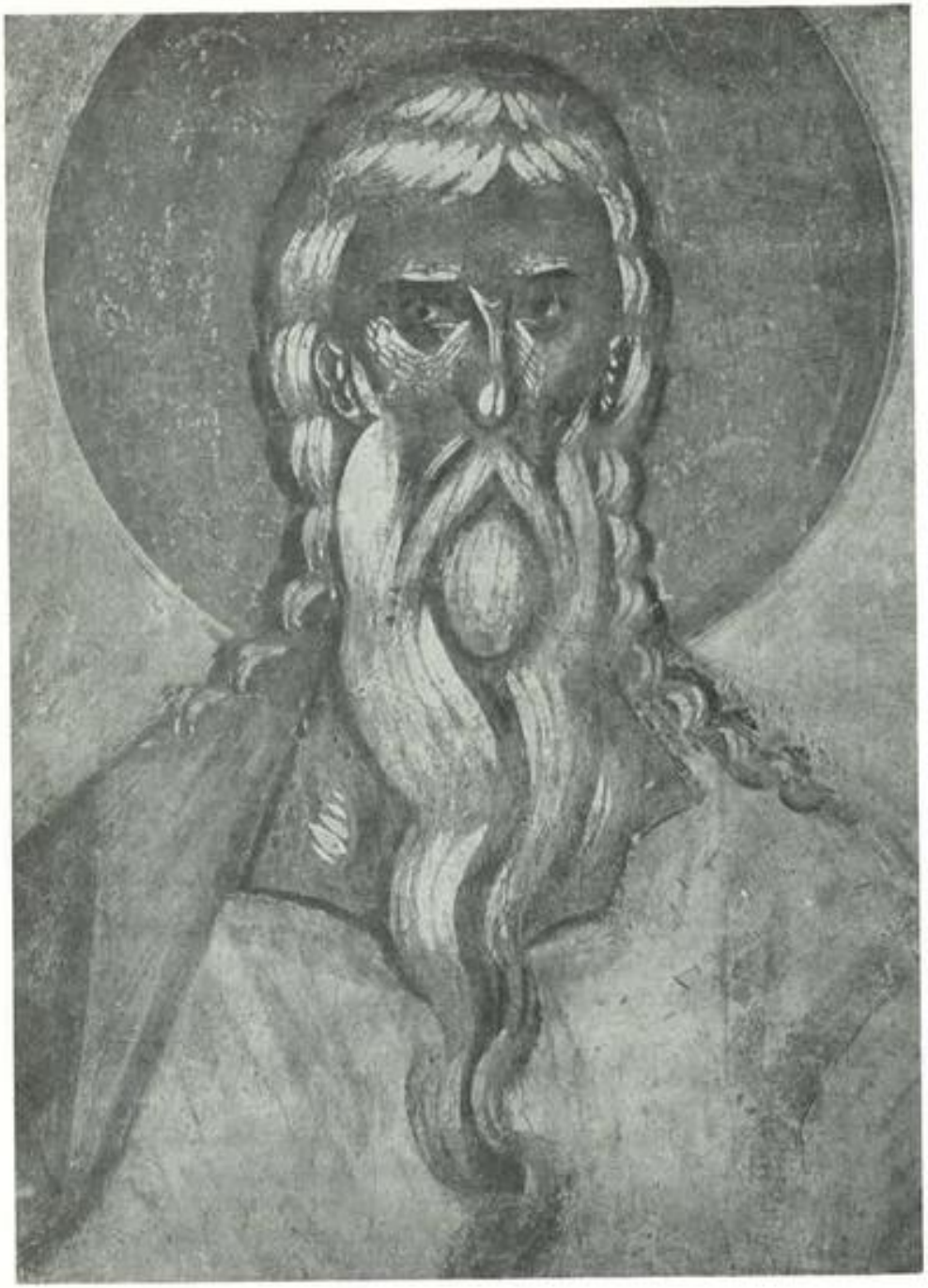
Ancient Russian art before the epoch of Peter I was an exclusively religious art, and as such it reflected the state of the spiritual life of its time.

We have already made a brief mention of Novgorod's ties with Macedonian art, which had experienced a renaissance during the reign of the Paleologues. These connections began taking effect by way of Kaffa (Theodosia) in Bulgaria, "where among the motley mixture of nationalities and religions there was an established Russian Colony of Cossacks which had its own churches. The Republic of Kaffa, dependent on Genoa and ruled by a Consul from Genoa and officials elected by all nationalities, was the main center of communication between Novgorod and Moscow on one side, and Byzantium and the West on the other (1266 -1475). Russians had their warehouses there. In 1370, the well-known iconographer Theophanes the Greek arrived in Novgorod through Kaffa. At the very end of the 14th century, owing to the efforts of Grand Prince Demetrius Mikhailovich, Moscow was already large and strong enough to be able to attract some prominent men from neighboring principalities and from Novgorod. Thus, Theophanes the Greek and Andrew Rublev went there to paint the Annunciation Cathedral (1395), the church of the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos (1399) and the Archangels' Cathedral (1405). The greatest and most perfect work of Russian iconography, the icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrew Rublev, also dates from this time."[179]

We shall now pause on the personalities of the great masters of the Russian Renaissance: Theophanes the Greek, Andrew Rublev and Master Dionysius.

The creative work of Theophanes the Greek (†ca. 1410), a foreigner, belongs to Russia, where he spent the best years of his life. His manner of painting is that of the Macedonian School, *i.e.*, Greek-Slavic art, which is represented also in the church in Volotovo Field in Novgorod. Mille and Diel attribute the Novgorodian masters to this School. The influence of Serbian-Athonite iconography has been described as follows: "Athonite hesychasts used to support an independent existence of the national Slavic States. Along with the provincial echoes of the art of Constantinople, it was in Serbia and on Mt. Athos (where the building of monasteries was progressing under the patronage of Serbian kings) that a thematically and stylistically specific school of painting was established. It was significantly different from the School of Constantinople and imbued with the spirit of the mystical movements. These new trends were absorbed by the Macedonian school of painting, which flourished at the end of

179. Kovalevsky, *The Historical Path of Russia* pp. 27-28.



AN ICON BY THEOPHANES THE GREEK
of Melchizedek of Salem, painted in 1378.

the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, both in Serbia and in the Byzantine world, on Mt. Athos, in Mistra. . . . " "In the frescoes painted by Theophanes and in those in the Volotovo Field church there were ecstatic elements not only in the subjects of the paintings, but in their very method of depiction. It was painting of 'storm and impact,' with strong subjectivism, great generalization, dynamic pathos, ardent geometry and perhaps Gothic expressionism. . . . Theophanes' heightened 'psychologism' seems to be not humanly emotional, but spiritually titanic. The images he created seem to be personages of a universal tragedy." "The remarkable and unique style characteristic of Theophanes manifests itself in unusually energetic and exceedingly expressive (usually short) brush-strokes; a unique expressive modelling; the depiction of light by means of sharp, dry, fine brush-strokes of white (usually over a dark brown background), and of deep shadows by means of similar black brush-strokes. Theophanes' style is rather generalized, without emphasis on details."[180]

In 1414 Epiphanius the Wise, an icon-painter, a disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh and the author of his Life, wrote a letter to St. Cyril of White Lake in which he described his impression of his meetings with Theophanes the Greek, characterizing him as follows: "He is a lively man, famous, wise and a very clever philosopher. No one saw him looking at any models, like other painters who look in bewilderment here and there, looking more than painting. Observing Theophanes, however, one may think that he is not working; while his hands paint, his feet are in motion; he converses with visitors, he directs his mind into remote depths, and with his bodily eyes he sees spiritual beauty. This amazing man loved me, the poor one, very much; and I, a humble and foolish man, acquired great daring and would often go to listen to him. Whether one talks to him for a long or short while, one cannot but be amazed at his mind, his stories and his 'clever personality.' "[181]

St. Andrew Rublev (†1427)[182] belonged to the period of flourishing hesychasm, and this was fully reflected in his painting. He was a worthy and obedient disciple of St. Nicon of Radonezh, "who ordered him to paint the icon of the All-Holy Trinity in praise of his spiritual father, St. Sergius the Wonder-worker." St. Joseph of Volotsk (Volokolamsk) wrote about the spiritual disposition of St. Andrew and the latter's fellow-faster and teacher, Daniel

180. Mikhailovsky and Purishev, *Essays on the History of Ancient Russian Monumental Painting*, pp. 27-28, 30.

181. *Orthodox Converser*, Vol. III (Kazan, 1863), p. 323.

182. Commemorated January 29 and July 4. He was officially canonized by the Moscow Patriarchate in July, 1988, although locally canonized for centuries *(editor)*.

the Black: "Wonderful and famous were they, the icon-painters Daniel and his pupil Andrew, always lifting their mind and thoughts to immaterial and divine Light. . . . For this reason Christ the Lord glorified them at the hour of their death." They both reposed and were buried in 1430 in the Monastery of St. Andronicus, where they were frescoing the church.[183]

Here is an opinion of a contemporary Russian art critic on St. Andrew Rublev's art: "Rublev differed from the master-painters of the Church of the Transfiguration in Volotovo Field, and not only in the fact that these painters were then connected with the Novgorod School while Rublev's art was formed within the Moscow School, established under the influence of the art of 14th century Constantinople during the political rise of Moscow. Rublev's originality and significance rest on the fact that, being a true classicist of the national ancient Russian painting, he embodied in his work features of the national artistic genius. . . . " "The world of the tragic is alien to Rublev. His work is devoid of any inner disharmony, which at times is so obvious in Western European artwork. The original style of his art is characterized by classical clarity and harmony. Through Byzantine painting, which always abounded in antique motifs, Rublev has penetrated deeply and with great creative wisdom into the essence of the aesthetic ideal of ancient Greece. Alienating himself from the restless and sharply individualized style of Theophanes the Greek (in whom many art critics wish to see the teacher of Rublev, on insufficient grounds), he filled his works with ideal images, the features of which were, to a significant extent, suggested to him by the age-old history of Byzantine painting. . . ." "His 'Trinity' is enveloped by the spirit of a harmonious translucent lyricism. The figures of angels do not become frozen in the hieratic grandeur of dispassion; intimately and with true feeling they incline their heads sideways while engaged in 'holy Discourse.' Their inner lyrical movement is emphasized by the circular motion of the composition, by the flowing rhythm of melodious lines and contours. . . . Subordinating his 'pure, ringing and strong' colors to the harmonizing principle, Rublev rises to a rare, tonal perfection, which is possible only on the level of truly great art. Among the masters of the ancient Russian painting, Rublev was, perhaps, the most classical one. . . . His art reflects the new stage in the development of the national culture of ancient Russia, which followed the decisive victory of the Russian people over Mongolian hordes during the Kulikovo Battle. In the person of Rublev, Russian people once again were entering the arena of universal culture, with an inexhaustible supply of creative power and possibilities. In this sense, Rublev is a profoundly national painter. After

183. Barsukov, *Sources of Russian Hagiography* (St. Petersburg, 1882), pp. 38 and 147.

AN ICON BY ST. ANDREW RUBLEV
of the Apostle Paul, painted about 1407.
From the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The Lay of Igor, his art is the greatest phenomenon in the history of ancient Russian art. His creative power and originality, his stately disposition, in the end reflect the intensive, enthusiastic national power of the people of Ancient Russia in the form of sacred art."[184]

A third great painter's art marks the last flowering of the Russian icon-painting which was genetically bound with the Hellenic tradition. His name was **Master Dionysius** (†ca. 1509). "From the monumental wall-paintings of the period under discussion, the most significant is the ensemble of fully-preserved frescoes of the Therapontes Monastery, painted by Dionysius and his sons in 1501. The basic tone of Dionysius' frescoes lies in an inner lucidity, a tender disposition to life invoking blessing upon the world, warmth of heart, profound sympathy with man and everything human. The images created by the artist do not depress, belittle or frighten the viewer; rather, they uplift man, arouse sympathy and love for him, awaken hope instead of fear. The moral pathos of Dionysius is revealed in the motifs of redemption, forgiveness, intercession, salvation and the healing of sufferers." "In 15th-century Russia there appeared and were promoted icons embodying church hymns, such as: 'In Thee rejoiceth . . . ,' 'Praise of the Mother of God,' 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence,' 'Meet it is,' and so on. . . . These joyous hymns to the wonder of life (as can be ascertained from those which have reached us) first appeared on church walls in the form of Dionysius' frescoes, in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow and in the Therapontes Monastery. Moreover, his basic system of depiction in frescoes does not follow a 'historical' or logically dogmatic sequence, but rather unfolds the subject matter in a suite of illustrations that accompanies, for example, the Akathist to the Virgin Mary. It is as if even the usual scenes of the 'Annunciation,' 'Descent into Hell,' etc., were now being born out of a song, out of music; and frescoes as a whole became musical lyrics translated into the language of painting."[185]

If we compare the character of this epoch's iconography with the spirit of its asceticism, we see that it was inspired by the latter and reflected the same wholeness, beauty and harmony. It was imbued with the same spirit as St. Sergius of Radonezh and the Northern Thebaid. The character of iconography changed with the onset of the 16th century. This has been confirmed by many art critics who appreciate the significance of a spiritual principle in art. Thus, Igor Grabar says: "The long reign of Ivan the Terrible was a period of very important changes in the destiny of the history of Russian art. The great School

184. Mikhailovsky and Purishev, *Essays on the History of Ancient Russian Monumental Painting*, pp. 16, 17 and 19.
185. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-49.

AN ICON BY MASTER DIONYSIUS

The Mother of God Hodigitria of Smolensk (detail), painted in the 15th century.

Courtesy of Castle De Wijenburgh, the Netherlands.

of Novgorod, which emerged in the 14th century and flourished in the 15th century, ceased to exist in the second half of the 16th century. But already towards the end of the 15th century, even the best works of Novgorodian painting began to reveal the features of an imminent decline – a tendency towards greater complexity. These features in art rather suggest the drying up of the inner sources which had been feeding it."[186]

Muratov, too, saw in the painting of the subsequent period, full of tendencies towards realism, only the degeneration and ruin of Russian art under the impact of Western influences.[187]

Mikhailovsky and Purishev, our contemporary art critics, while bypassing the religious significance of art and adhering to their positivist views, have come to the following conclusion: "In the 16th century, the Hellenic tradition in Russian painting was gradually dying away. The refined lyricism of Dionysius found no successors. On the other hand, the world of matter once again asserted its rights; the time was ripe for a 'discovery' of the world, which was now no longer interpreted by painters as a kind of 'emanation' of the human or divine spirit, but as a reality existing outside an individual, a reality which was multiform and of equal rights and even value with the spirit. It is true, old Russian painting still remained within the sphere of ethical norms and concepts sanctified by many centuries and by Church dogma; it did not completely lose its sacred character. Nevertheless, the elements of a specific 'Russian quatrocento' were becoming increasingly crystallized, reaching greater maturity and striking expression in numerous frescoes in the second half of the 17th century. These murals represented the world in a kaleidoscopic movement and diversity of colors; human beings, animals, birds, plants, elements and objects formed a festive, somewhat fancy panorama reminiscent of the animated frescoes of Pizanello or Benozzo Gozzolli. A noisy novella intruded into the world of the majestic epos of Rublev and the tender lyricism of Dionysius."[188]

11. THE 17TH CENTURY

Beginning with the epoch of the Renaissance, a change of ideological direction was taking place in the West. The Gothic period of history (the harmonius epoch) was replaced by the period of Humanism (the epoch of Prom-

186. Igor Grabar, *The Icon*, no. 21 (Moscow), pp. 313-314.
187. Mouratoff, *Les Icones Russes* (Paris, 1927).
188. Mikhailovsky and Purishev, *Essays on the History of Ancient Russian Monumental Painting*, p. 20.

etheus, according to Schubart). This tempestuous transitional period was marked by great discoveries and staggering events.

Russia, too, could not escape the spirit of the times. In the 17th century, "the equilibrium was lost and the very soul became displaced." This was the century of changes, troubles and dissidence, the century of the decline of Holy Russia and the great idea of "Moscow – the Third Rome."

We will now take a closer look at the origin of this idea, which turned out to be of such importance in Russian ideology. Its roots go back into the history of ancient Byzantium.

In those distant times of the Middle Ages and even earlier, when the Byzantine Empire was being formed, life was inseparable from religion. The wholeness of man's world-view and disposition reigned supreme. Everything was sanctified by the Church: the transformed Orthodox "state, empire, nation was entrusted with great and eternal behests and worship which were part of the plan of the divine economy of the world. It had eternal significance. Therefore, the state power was instituted by God; it served the purposes of God's Kingdom and was responsible before God for bringing the nation it ruled to the threshold of the future Kingdom of Christ, in all purity of faith, free of heresies."[189]

This theocratic government was based on the idea of "symphony," or a harmonious blend of two powers, that of the emperor and that of the patriarch. Each in his own sphere – the emperor in the secular, and the patriarch in the spiritual sphere – had to strive towards the realization of the one higher purpose. "There are two great blessings, the gifts of Almighty God's mercy to mankind: priesthood and sovereignty" (Justinian's sixth novella). They complement one another: the Creator has entrusted one "to care for men's souls," and the other "to govern their bodies."[190]

The emperor's rank is a special kind of service to the Church. The Church sanctified the power of the sovereign by a sacrament which endowed it with spiritual meaning and provided a canonical basis for it. Through the sacrament, a king or emperor receives a special grace of the Holy Spirit, of which we read already in the Old Testament.[191] Through the rite of sacramental anointing, when a king is anointed by "great myrrh," he is made king and sovereign of all Romans, *i.e.*, all Christians.[192] The first duty of the emperor thus "anointed

189. Kartashev, *Holy Rus' in the Ways of Russia* (Paris), pp. 7 and 8.
190. Priest Alexander Schmemann, "Ways of Byzantine Theocracy," in *Orthodox Thought* (Paris, 1947), p. 131.
191. *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward* (I Samuel 16:13).
192. From Patriarch Anthony's epistle to the Grand Prince of Moscow Basil Dimitrievich, in Metropolitan Macarius, *History of the Russian Church*, Vol. V, p. 469.

by God" is to "preserve the Christian Faith in all purity and to protect the state of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church from all tribulations."[193]

"An Orthodox *basileios* [king] is a canonically plenipotentiary guardian of the Church, a defender of dogmas and piety in their inviolable state. He alone holds this universal Orthodox status for other Orthodox peoples,"[194] and, according to St. John Chrysostom, he has a special mystical meaning in the world, as the one who *restrains [withholds]*, who does not let *the mystery of iniquity* which *doth already work* be fulfilled (II Thes. 2:6-7).

Thus, the empire has an Orthodox mission, and the emperor is, first of all, the symbol and bearer of this mission. Proper service in the rank of emperor is regarded by the Church as a great and arduous task *(podvig)*, and therefore an emperor may be canonized a saint, "namely as an emperor, as a God-anointed head of a Christian empire."[195]

From the moment the world Christian empire was established, the center of the world's life was shifted from ancient Rome to Constantinople, the New Rome.

Russia adoped Orthodoxy from Byzantium with unusual ease, and along with it the Byzantine world-view. Without suspecting it herself, Byzantium was preparing her historical successor in the Russian people. From the moment the Eastern empire died politically, Russia took upon herself the mission of a chosen Orthodox sovereignty, "the New Israel"; and thus the center of Orthodoxy moved to Moscow — the Third Rome — replacing the Second, fallen Rome. Under the influence of Orthodoxy and the idea of the Third Rome, "Holy Russia" forged the powerful cultural-historical identity of the Russian people, and built the Great Empire.[196]

At first, everything was contributing to Russia's success. The State expanded and grew stronger. In the 16th century the "gathering of land" came to

193. Schmemann, "Ways of Byzantine Theocracy," p. 132.
194. Kartashev, *Holy Rus' in the Ways of Russia*, p. 8.
195. Schmemann, "The Dogmatic Union," in *Orthodox Thought* (Paris, 1948), p. 178.
196. "There has been no precedent in history where people who created their own culture on the basis of a certain inspiration, a certain ideal, would change this ideal in the prime of their power, and would begin creating, quite successfully, a new culture on a new theme. It would not be possible. Nations usually embody their spirit in only one form which is peculiar to them; and they are destined, so to speak, to adhere to it throughout their historical life span, developing and enriching it, but never replacing or betraying it. To betray the original spirit is cultural suicide, or ethnic old age and devaluation of the nation." Thus, having once taken upon herself the mission of the Orthodox state, Russia had determined her historical path. Professor Kartashev, *Holy Rus' in the Ways of Russia*, p. 16.

an end; Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia submitted to Russia. The centralization reforms of Ivan the Terrible and Metropolitan Macarius began taking effect. The Tsar was crowned and the Patriarchate established. But great trials were awaiting Russia. They were caused by the fact that, although Russia in the 15th century was elevated to the "height of universal responsibility for the destiny of the entire Orthodox world," the level of her culture and education did not correspond to the greatness of her calling.[197]

The cruel destruction of Novgorod by Ivan the Terrible, the destruction of the city's ancient culture, and the annihilation of its educated class of people, the bearer of old customs and traditions, changed the former face of ancient Russia. The submission of Eastern principalities seemed to promote this state of affairs by orientating Russian life in a new direction. Trade routes and life centers shifted now to Asia, and the morals and manners of the newly formed State acquired Asiatic features, due more to the victory than to the previous defeats.[198] The break with Byzantium caused the weakening of patristic traditions in Russian spiritual life; the aspect of "inward activity" in asceticism was gradually relegated to oblivion; ascetic endeavors acquired more severe and external characteristics while the general spiritual level of monasticism became significantly lower. Large monasteries were turning into privileged and well-off monastic communities where the inhabitants enjoyed good food in general; and refined meals were served to commemorate departed benefactors. The former intensely ascetic life gave way to "comfortable life" and "adherence to ritualism" (Professor Kartashev). The way of life *(byt)* which used to draw strength from the beneficial influence of monasteries was thus losing its spiritual foundation and support. As a result, the general spiritual resistance of the country was weakened, and during the Time of Troubles it became subject to a strong Latin impetus and to Western influence.

The 17th century began with an upheaval which effected changes within the nation; and people became agitated and distrustful because of their instability. They were in a state of confusion; wholeness and stability were lost. Their psychology underwent changes. Their world-view, theology and ancient traditions were shaken and had to be reestablished. Their way of life was disintegrating, and there was a need to establish a norm, a model. The need was felt to correct the church service books in accordance with the ancient models. The task proved to be incredibly difficult and seemed to require an authoritative power which would establish uniformity and put an end to the "swaying of the world."

197. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
198. Grabar, *The Icon*, no. 21, pp. 313-314.

Patriarch Nicon began to implement the much-needed reform peremptorily and hastily, and the enterprise did not run smoothly: the "swaying" continued. The main thrust of Nicon's reform was the rejection of the old Russian rite and ritual and their replacement by new Greek ones, and at the same time the censuring of the Council of Stoglav [The Hundred Chapters], which had taken place with the purpose of collecting Russian antiquities.[199] Professor Georges Florovsky has tried to penetrate into the deeper causes of the Schism *(Raskol)*. Patriarch Nicon was accused of destroying Russian antiquity. However, this was not the essence of the agitation which surrounded him. When defending the independence and freedom of the Church in the struggle with leading ecclesiastical circles, Patriarch Nicon leaned upon the idea of the supremacy of "the priesthood" over "the kingdom," based on the patristic teaching on "kingdoms" by St. John Chrysostom. This deeply disturbed the Old-Believers. Previously there had been the idea of the Third Rome – full of grace, a sanctified life, a sanctified "kingdom" [on earth] – and it was being realized in the earthly kingdom, not in the Church [since the Church was otherworldly]. The kingdom and the Church were intermingled. And now, all of a sudden, Nicon was saying that the priesthood was above the kingdom. Consequently, there was no complete unity between the kingdom and the priesthood, they were not one; there was no single unifying principle in life, there were two.

And indeed, the idea of "symphony" acknowledges two heterogenous principles: the secular and the ecclesiastical, Caesar's and God's. The Church is not of this world, but of God; an earthly government, however, is an organization of earthly life and it is established by the creative powers of man. In "symphony," the government acknowledges the law of the Church as the basic law of life, as a higher value, and it tries to serve it and realize it in life. But "symphony" is a task which is accomplished only potentially; it is only the beginning of life, a confession of the highest principle and a desire to serve it. The temptation of the Old-Believers' Schism lay in the fact that, having understood the value of "symphony" and come to love the Orthodox kingdom, the Old-Believers loved it so much that they began to think of it as a saving "Kingdom," and forgot the Church.[200]

"Symphony" is a harmonious combination of two principles of life: the natural and the supernatural, of this world and of the world of God. In "symphony," they exist inseparably but cannot fuse into one: there will always be two laws – the natural and the supernatural.

199. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 58.
200. P. S. L., "Materials for the Study of Holy Russia," in *Orthodox Russia*, no. 4 (Vladimirova, Czechoslovakia, 1941).

The temptation of the Schism *(Raskol)* was to fuse them into one, so that there would be only one law: a kingdom within a Kingdom. The Schism was in search of a sacred rhythm, rite, or custom, a ritual of life, a visible piety and a way of life *(byt)*. It was in search of a "Typicon of salvation." This would be a theocratic utopia, a theocratic chiliasm, a dream of a paradise on earth. The Old-Believers were more disturbed by the deviation of the Tsar than by Nicon's activity. If the Tsar would be unfaithful to the "State-Kingdom," it would mean the end of the Third Rome – "and there shall never be a fourth one." Life had become deprived of grace and would never be a "holy life." The Schism meant breaking away from catholicity *(sobornost)*, departure from history. Where there is no grace, there is no Church, no holy life. Only zeal is left, hence again making a ritual of a "way of life."[201]

The termination of the cultural and enlightening influence of Byzantium, beginning from the moment that Russia broke away from it, made Russians feel isolated and led to stagnation, both in their intellectual life and in all other spheres of life. In the long run, it meant a lowering of the nation's cultural level in comparison with that of the past, and evoked general illiteracy. At the same time the West made very significant cultural progress, and now Russia had to borrow education from there. Western and Roman Catholic influence began to penetrate from the South, through Kiev, when Metropolitan Peter Mogila's organizational activity resulted in a "pronounced Romanization of Orthodoxy, its Latin pseudo-morphosis and an inward intoxication with religious Latinism."[202] By imitating the West, Kiev had reached a significant degree of scholarship. In the school of Metropolitan Peter Mogila, teaching was done in Latin. Thus was formed the Western school tradition; but it lacked creativity, because of a disharmony between spiritual experience and thought. Along with Kievan scholarship, a strong and lasting Western influence made its way into Russia.

St. Anthony of Leokhnov (†c. 1613)[203] was the son of the boyar Veniaminov. He was familiar with patristic literature, and made references to St. Isidore of Pelusium and St. Anthony the Great. He lived the life of a hermit and mortified his body by severe ascetic labors. He joined another ascetic, Hieromonk Tarasius. A monastery was formed, Ivan the Terrible went to see him and granted him fishing rights.

201. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 49.
202. *Ibid.*
203. Commemorated October 17.

St. Euphrosyne of Blue Jay Lake (†1612)[204] established a monastic community in the name of the Annunciation on the shore of Blue Jay Lake. On March 19, 1612, foreseeing the approach of the Poles, he forewarned the local inhabitants. He went to meet the enemy attired in his schema; standing by the cross, he was killed together with the monk St. Jonah.

St. Galacteon of Vologda (†1612)[205] was known in secular life as Prince Gabriel Belsky, the son of a boyar executed by Ivan the Terrible. As an infant he was hidden in the town of Staritsa with the family of a cobbler, whose trade he subsequently learned. After he became a widower, he embraced a life of severe asceticism and fell ill. However, he continued living as a recluse, and by the grace of the Lord regained his health. He was tonsured a monk and continued to work as a cobbler, dividing the money he thus earned between the Church and the poor. Then he chained himself to the ceiling so that he could sleep standing on his knees. "Having received from God the gift of wisdom and consolation, he would instruct and console all who came to see him" (eldership). Twice he left his seclusion: the first time when the bishop ordered him to attend a community prayer *(moleben)* asking the Lord to grant rain; the second time when he went to the premises of the local council and foretold the incursion of the Lithuanians. St. Galacteon appealed to the people to repent, and to erect a church in one day in memory to the Mother of God of the Sign. His words were not heeded, and the Saint's terrible prediction came true. He himself was slashed to death by the enemy. Miracles were worked through his relics.

St. Irenarchus (†1616)[206] was a representative of purely Russian asceticism. The severity of his ascetic endeavors surpasses all imagination. A fool-for-Christ, John the Big Helmet, said to him: "God gives you a horse, and no one but you will be able to ride or sit on him." The gift of prophecy distinguished St. Irenarchus even before he began his ascetic labors. When still a child, he announced that he would be a monk and wear iron. As a youth he saw the burial of his father some 300 miles away. Later, just as mysteriously, during the singing of the Cherubic Hymn, he learned about his mother's death. He labored in the Monastery of Sts. Boris and Gleb on the river Ustya, near Rostov. Seeing a barefoot wanderer, he gave him his own boots and implored God to send him patience and warmth for his feet. From that time on he walked barefoot. The abbot mercilessly punished him with hunger and cold for such extreme asceticism. He was forbidden to be present in the church. He left for another monastery, where he was appointed a cellarer, but, shunning the honor, Irenarchus went

204. Commemorated March 20.
205. Commemorated September 24.
206. Commemorated January 13.

into seclusion in a third monastery. However, from there he was summoned back to the Sts. Boris and Gleb Monastery, where he had given his initial vows. Upon his return he chained himself, and thus endured his superhuman ascetic labor for twenty-five years. Elder Irenarchus left the "implements of his labor": 142 copper crosses, 7 shoulder weights, a 140-foot-long chain which he wore around his neck, fetters for his feet, 18 iron fetters which he wore on his arms and chest, bonds weighing about 35 pounds which he wore around his waist, a stick with which he subdued his body and chased away invisible demons. Subsequently these "implements" acquired healing properties. When touching them, people would be healed. The Saint was driven out of the monastery, and again he was summoned back. When he returned the second time, the Saint became an elder: "He instructed all his visitors to keep the commandments, protected them from their sins, and revealed their secret transgressions." He fervently loved his native country, this being one of the typical features of Russian saints. Once when he was asleep he had a vision of the future destruction of Russia by the Lithuanians. When he awoke he heard a voice: "Go to Moscow and make it known that all this will come to pass." This order was repeated three times. The Saint set off for Moscow and revealed this prophecy to Tsar Basil Shuisky. He spent twelve hours in Moscow. He refused to accept gifts from the Tsaritsa, although the Tsar tried to persuade him: "Take them for the sake of God." During the incursion of the Lithuanians, some Polish noblemen came to the monastery and tried to put his faith to the test. "I believe in the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," answered the Elder. "And who is your Tsar here on earth?" "I have a Russian Tsar, Basil Ioannovich; I live in Russia and my Tsar is a Russian. I shall not betray my faith and the Tsar of Russia." He repeated the same to Sapega:[207] "I was born in Russia, and I pray to God for the Russian Tsar." He urged Sapega to go home, telling him that otherwise he would be killed (which soon came to pass). Sapega gave him five roubles for charity and forbade his soldiers to plunder the monastery. Like St. Sergius, St. Irenarchus was a protector of the Russian land before God. He keenly followed all the events and served his country with the gift of prophecy. After the victory at Kalyazin, the Elder sent his cross and a prosphora to Prince Michael Skopin-Shuisky with the following words: "Dare, and God will help you." He again repeated his encouragement when the Prince was worried about the enemy's intentions to attack him near the besieged Holy Trinity Lavra at Moscow: "Dare, and do not fear: God will help you." After he entered Moscow, the Prince returned the cross to the Saint, along with some gifts.

207. A general during the reign of Peter I *(editor)*.

The Elder underwent his last severe test when the savage, intoxicated Abbot and five monks threw him out of his cell, breaking his arm. The Lord made the Abbot come to his senses, and the Saint heard a voice announcing his own imminent heavenly reward: "Angels wonder at your endurance." But the Saint's tormented country was still in need of his life. Now he inspired Prince Pozharsky. In the Elder's Life we read: "The Elder Irenarchus, who followed all the events and understood the situation, sent his blessing and a prosphora to D. M. Pozharsky and bade him to go to Moscow with his troops and not to fear Ivan Zarutsky. 'You will see the glory of God,' was his message to the Prince. The Prince rejoiced at the Elder's words and fearlessly moved with his troops towards Moscow. On their way there they stopped in Rostov. Both Prince Pozharsky and Cosmas Minin went to the Monastery of Sts. Boris and Gleb to receive Elder Irenarchus' blessing personally. In 1613, the Saint blessed Prince Lykov, who was about to set out against the predatory mob. Thus, through the tears and *podvig* of St. Irenarchus, Russia finally attained the much desired peace.

St. Irenarchus, however, did not stand alone in his holy patriotic endeavors. His name, and the names of Patriarchs Hermogenes and Philaret, Archimandrite Dionysius and cellarer Abraham Palitsyn, were not only names of great ascetics of the Church; these men were also national heroes, along with Prince Pozharsky and Cosmas Minin. . . . This was Holy Russia at the Time of Troubles [1613].

St. Macarius of Zhabyn (†1623)[208] is remembered for reestablishing the Zhabyn Monastery in the Kaluga region, not far from Optina Monastery.

St. Bassian of Tiksa (†1624)[209] began his ascetic life under the guidance of an "experienced elder"; he renounced his will and was in obedience to the will of his director. Later he departed to the Tiksa River, where the local parish alloted some land for his cell. Only his spiritual father was allowed to enter St. Bassian's cell; with his visitors St. Bassian conversed through the little window. The Abbot of the monastery visited him and blessed him to wear a chain on his arms, fetters on his feet, an iron helmet on his head, and an iron hoop on his waist which he hid under a cowl. No one knew what a heavy *podvig* he took upon himself. Day and night he knelt in prayer. Soon after his death a special *moleben* was sung to commemorate him as a saint [a local canonization], and many miracles took place.

St. Diodorus or Damian of George Hill (†1633).[210] At a time when contemplative ascetics had become scarce, and one could no longer encounter

208. Commemorated January 22.
209. Commemorated September 12.
210. Commemorated November 27.

"non-acquisitors," St. Diodorus and his contemporary, St. Eleazar of Anzersk, were a striking example of both of these aspects of asceticism. St. Diodorus was tonsured in Solovki Monastery. Under the influence of the Lives of anchorites, as told by his father who was also a monk, St. Diodorus went into the forest after his father's death. For forty days he ate only grass and dew, and became faint from hunger. The brethren of the monastery found him where he had been gathering berries, and they thought he was dead. However, St. Diodorus set out anew and settled in a deserted cell. Soon the Saint met other anchorites. Once during winter he met the anchorite Nicephorus, a layman from Novgorod. The anchorite was completely naked. He said to the Saint: "Keep visiting, Damian, keep visiting, so that God will visit you also," and he ran away. Another time St. Diodorus visited a still more perfect anchorite, Timothy, a native of Alexin, who had fled to the desert during the reign of the Pretender Demetrius. Timothy reached the island (of Solovki) in a small boat, went deep into the desert, and built a small hut there. For three years he endured temptations and hunger, until a radiant heavenly elder appeared to him and showed him the water he should drink and the grass he should eat.

Living among the anchorites, St. Diodorus did not lose contact with the monastery; he would go there and bring necessary food to the anchorites. The cellarer Cyricus of the monastery infirmary decided to join him in the desert. Cyricus' flight from the monastery turned out to be the last straw. . . . The monastery administration sent out armed guards to search out the fugitives. They seized ten anchorites and destroyed their cells. St. Diodorus, as the chief evildoer, was bound in irons and thrown into the infirmary. The monastery administration was of the opinion that monks fleeing into the desert brought much harm to their coenobium. This was a manifestation of antagonism between anchorites and coenobitic monks, similar to what took place on Mt. Athos.

St. Diodorus ran away again, sailing across the sea in a boat. At first he chose to stay on Keno Lake, but he was beaten up by the local inhabitants. From there he moved towards Zavadly Lake and settled on George Hill. This place was beautiful and suitable for anchoretic life. For seven years St. Diodorus struggled there alone, and then a certain monk Prochorus joined him. Once a resplendent man appeared to him and ordered him to build three churches there. This vision was repeated three times. He was perplexed as to how he could undertake the project without any means, but was commanded to approach the cellarer of the Holy Trinity Lavra, Alexander (Bulatnikov), a notable man and the godfather of the Tsar's children. St. Diodorus found the cellarer in Moscow. The latter not only personally helped him, but introduced the Saint to the mother of the Tsar, the nun Martha. The Saint received the necessary sum of

money. He was also given a letter to Metropolitan Cyprian of Novgorod, who appointed a priest [to celebrate Divine Services in the monastery]. The three churches were erected, brethren came to settle there, and thus the monastery was formed. Being true to the principle of non-acquisitiveness, the Saint did not acquire any property. At times, when the lack of means was felt and the brethren murmured, help would arrive in a miraculous manner, as it usually did for the saints of this type. Thus, St. Alexander of Oshevensk appeared to St. Diodorus and commanded him to go and fish. The brethren caught many fish and the situation was remedied. A second time the same command came from an icon of the Mother of God. The next time they were hungry they caught a black fox near the monastery. They sold the fox and bought bread with the money. Now that the brethren of the monastery had multiplied, they were forced to fell trees and plough the land.

St. Eleazar of Anzersk [Solovki] (†1656).[211] His Life was written around 1700. The Saint's autobiographical data have been preserved in a copy. St. Eleazar was a writer and a lover of books. At first he went to Solovki Monastery, but wishing for silence he secluded himself on the deserted Anzersk Island. In 1616 he became a schema-monk, then built a chapel and a cell for himself there on the island. Soon ascetics began flocking to him. The Saint established an ancient skete Rule for them, following the example of the Holy Fathers. "The cells of hesychastic desert-dwellers," according to his Life, "were placed a mile apart from each other. On Saturday evenings and on the eves of feast days they would assemble for community worship and spend all night and the next day in prayer. After singing the Sunday or the feast-day service, they would break up and go each to his own cell to contemplate about God." Their usual occupation consisted of praying, singing, fasting and handiwork according to their individual strength. They would reveal all their temptations to their experienced saintly elder and take his advice. St. Eleazar himself, being of strong health by nature, wore iron chains on his body and committed himself to arduous labors, both spiritual and physical. He would pray on his knees for hours, chop and carry wood, and copy books. It is said about him in the church records that "Fr. Eleazar lived for many years, left a Rule for living a pious life; established *eldership*, and copied some books with his own hand."[212] All these books he contributed to the church library. Not limiting himself to copying and compiling books, he bought many and acquired others through donations, thus laying the foundation of the Anzersk library. In his ascetic life, St. Eleazar was often subjected to temptations of the enemy. Once the devil appeared to him in

211. Commemorated January 13.
212. *Orthodox Converser*, Vol. II (1859), p. 75.

the guise of a monk, allegedly sent from Solovki to fetch the Saint. This imaginary monk disappeared, however, when the Saint recited the Lord's Prayer. Likewise, visible enemies — thieves — attempted to attack the Saint, but they became deprived of reason and continued circling around his cell until the Saint himself came to their rescue. His Life records instances of his clairvoyance. His fame reached Moscow, and Tsar Michael Feodorovich Romanov summoned him and asked him to pray that an heir might be born to him. The Tsar did not let him go until Alexius Mikhailovich was born. Overjoyed, the Tsar offered the Saint a position of power and honor, but the latter wished only to return to his wilderness. He only accepted some gifts for the church. He was summoned to Moscow a second time by Alexius Mikhailovich, who presented him with a charter, embellished with gold and granting him everything necessary for the church, and issued an edict about erecting a stone church in St. Eleazar's skete. The building had already begun during the reign of the late Tsar, but had been temporarily discontinued because St. Eleazar had wanted to erect a much bigger church than permitted by the funds then available. In this respect St. Eleazar differed from St. Nilus of Sora, who was also a hesychast, a founder of skete life and a writer, like St. Eleazar. St. Nilus of Sora chose a somber site for his skete and insisted on building a wooden church, so that nothing external would distract from inward concentration and contemplation. St. Eleazar, on the other hand, being an aesthete by nature, loved everything beautiful and envisaged a magnificent church. He did not live to see the completion of the church building. Shortly before his death, the Saint was to endure imprisonment by Solovki officials for defending the independence of his skete. This was another example of the antagonism mentioned in St. Diodorus' Life, *i.e.*, the antagonism between the two kinds of monasticism. Due to his meekness, St. Eleazar did not complain to the Tsar, and he was saved through the intervention of the governor of the region.

Here is an edifying narrative by Elder Nectarius of Optina on how to express one's gratitude to God:[213]

"St. Eleazar was a native of our parts," said Elder Nectarius, "born into a lower middle-class family of Kozelsk. Through his God-pleasing labors he attained the gift of contrition and tears. Once at night, he stepped out onto the porch of his cell and looked at the beauty and serenity of the nature surrounding Anzersk Skete, illumined by the wonderful Northern Lights. He was moved to tears, and a prayerful sigh escaped his heart, which was overflowing with divine love: 'O Lord, how beautiful is Thy creation; and how can I, a contemptible

213. *The Trinity Word (Troitskoe Slovo)*, a weekly magazine of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, volume for 1909.

ST. DEMETRIUS OF ROSTOV

A hagiographer and a link between epochs.

An icon painted in 1822, in the collection of Valaam Monastery.

worm, thank Thee for all Thy great and abundant mercies shown to me?' The power of the Saint's prayerful sigh made the skies part, and to his spiritual eyes there appeared hosts of radiant powers, and they sang the great angelic hymn of praise: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.' And an invisible voice told the Saint: 'With these words you, too, Eleazar, thank your Creator.' "

With Sts. Diodorus and Eleazar (17th century), we conclude our cycle of saints of the period of "ancient Russia." In them, before the virtual annihilation of monasticism and the secularization of monastic property, the Lord once more raised up saints whose features very strongly remind us of the ancient desert-dwellers.

Such was the situation in Muscovite Russia. But let us say a few words about the southwestern monasticism of the 17th century. There, too, one encountered the features of contemplative asceticism. **Job Knyaginitsky** (†1621, not canonized) labored for a long time on Mt. Athos, and having returned to his homeland he founded a whole series of monasteries, the Ugornitsky Monastery being one of them. **St. Job of Pochaev** (†1651)[214] began his monastic life in the Ugornitsky Monastery. He established the now-famous Pochaev Lavra, over which he was abbot for the course of fifty years. He was a cave-dweller, a protector of Orthodoxy, a writer and printer in his monastery, and a miracle-worker.

St. Demetrius (Tuptalo) of Rostov (1651-1709)[215] was a metropolitan since 1703. A divinely-inspired writer, he compiled the *Lives of Saints* using 1) the Moscow Menaion of Metropolitan Macarius, 2) Greek and Latin sources, 3) Russian hagiographic materials, and so on. He was also the author of other spiritual works. Being a contemplative ascetic, he taught unceasing prayer and mental activity. His style was lively, easy and inspired. Here is one passage of his *Spiritual Alphabet*: "Why do you not delight in the All-Holy Name of the Lord Jesus? Why does your hardened heart remain cold? Why do you prefer tempting, dreary vanity to the joyful and sweet invocation of the Lord? Why do you prefer Cain-like, enfeebling indolence to fervent, warm entreaties to God? Entreat, entreat, do not be lazy, evoke Him diligently, tirelessly. Let not your eyes close in sleep nor your eyelids succumb to drowsiness, until you find the One you are searching for, until you are united with Infinite Being."[216]

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214. Commemorated August 28 and October 28.
215. Commemorated September 21.
216. *The Spiritual Alphabet* of St. Demetrius of Rostov (Moscow, 1909), p. 242.

ST. PAISIUS VELICHKOVSKY

The original portrait, kept in Optina and published by Ivan Kireyevsky in the first printed biography of the Saint.

PART V

A Brief Survey of the 18th and 19th Centuries

The hermits who would forsake the life of luxury for the forest wilderness and explore the writings of the profound sages of Christian Greece in inaccessible ravines, and then return to teach the people who understood them; the educated town leaders, the popular assemblies in the cities, the free expanse of Russian life, as we know it from folk-songs — where has all this gone? How could all this have given way to the pressure of alien elements? Why was the foreign and not the Russian principle bound to triumph? (Kireyevsky, 1838)

METROPOLITAN ARSENIUS MATSIEVICH
depicted in prison as a defrocked layman, with a little picture of him as a prelate.
From The Russian Church in the 18th Century *by E. Poselianin, 1905.*

Chapter One

THE PERSECUTION OF MONASTICISM (18th Century)

FROM THE BEGINNING of the 18th century, monasticism went through a period of persecution. The period of Muscovite Russia which existed under the sign of "symphony," cooperation between the Church and the State, came to an end. Humanism produced new ideas, those of "natural law." Now the purpose of the State was the attainment of "common good" (prosperity) for all. The Church too, along with the State, had to contribute to the realization of this good. Secular power became self-contained, to the exclusion of everything else. Thus, a system of absolute State supremacy over the Church came into being. Peter I had carefully studied the church administration of Protestant countries, and, using Scandinavian countries as a model, installed it in Russia. Church administration became the concern not of the Church, but of the State. From now on the clergy served in "the clerical rank"; they were obliged to report sins against the State, were not to have an influence upon people, and were forbidden to call on parishioners on feast days.

Measures undertaken against monasteries were particularly harsh. Peter called them "gangrene of the State" and spoke of monks as parasites and cheats. Monks were not allowed to have paper and quills in their cells. Monastic coloni-

zation was abolished even in Siberia. Among other monasteries, Optina Monastery was closed down in 1724. Peter's decrees directed against monasteries were followed by those of Anna Ioannovna; a particularly harsh decree was issued by Catherine II in 1764. This year was the black year for Russian monasticism.

Hierarch Arsenius Matsievich (†1772),[1] who protested against the confiscation of church valuables, was deprived of his rank and even monasticism, and died in the Revel (Tallin) prison as "layman Andrew." Monasteries became depopulated. From the moment the land and patrimonial estates were taken away, the rich monasteries became impoverished, while the average ones had to close. Many monastery churches were often left without cupolas and crosses; their roofs were overgrown with moss, the cells stood askew, propped up; the monastery walls were dilapidated. There was a general shortage of hieromonks, and brethren had to ask "white" priests to perform services. Aged and ailing monks stayed in monasteries waiting to die; some monasteries left without inhabitants simply closed. Monasticism, deprived and impoverished, presented a rather pitiable picture of disintegration. For example, the appointed Abbot of Valaam Monastery, Abbot Nazarius, complained about vagrant monks (1795-96). However, already in 1786 Metropolitan Gabriel himself issued an order forbidding monks to "wander about and stay at people's homes." Parish priests were now regarding their clerical position as a source of income. Alcoholism became the common scourge.[2]

At a superficial glance, it might have seemed that monasticism had died for good. In acutal fact, monasticism emerged purified and regenerated out of a 100-year-long period of persecution, and regained its former spiritual beauty. During the time when spiritual principles were subject to persecution, when monasteries were being deserted, spiritually creative individuals had to retire into their inner selves, hidden from the world. Somewhere deep down the true concept of spiritual endeavor was bound to remain preserved. Somewhere in the remote corners, God's elect were gathering spiritual strength through their secret ascetic labors: thanks to them, true monastic life could be reborn when persecution came to an end at last.

The Lives of the ascetics of the period of persecution have not yet been properly studied. Only a few hierarchs were canonized, although the number of saints was rather significant. For instance, there were two women-ascetics who contributed to the revival of Russian monasteries, including Optina Hermitage. **Elder Dositheus** (born 1721),[3] who struggled in Kiev and blessed St. Seraphim

1. Commemorated February 28.
2. See *Christian Readings* for 1901, Part II, p. 500, etc.
3. Commemorated September 25.

ROYAL RECLUSE DOSITHEA OF MOSCOW

A Northern disseminator of Paisian teaching.

From The Russian Church in the 18th Century, *1905*.

(of Sarov) to embrace monasticism, instructing him in remembrance of God and the recitation of the Jesus Prayer, was actually a woman, known in the secular world as Daria Tyapkina, of a noble family in the Riazan Province. Due to the circumstances of the time she was forced to dress as a monk and hide in a cave near Kitaev Hermitage. The devout Empress Elizabeth Petrovna personally visited her and ordered that she be tonsured – in other words, she legalized her existence. Elder Dositheus kept her secret until the end of her life. During her last years, the blessed "Elder" had a certain Theophan for a cell-attendant, whom she sent to Moldavia, a center of spiritual rebirth headed by St. Paisius Velichkovsky. There Theophan acquired friends and contacts among true ascetics. Having returned to Russia, Theophan found Elder Dositheus still alive and stayed with her until the Elder's blessed repose.[4] Soon afterwards he went to the Solovki Monastery and became a desert-dweller and great ascetic there.

Another blessed nun of the same name, the **Royal Recluse Dosithea of Moscow** (†1810)[5] was generally assumed to be Princess Augusta Tarakanova, the legitimate daughter of Empress Elizabeth from her marriage to Count Razumovsky. She was forcibly tonsured in 1785 by the order of Empress Catherine II, and became a recluse in Ivanov Monastery in Moscow. While still a novice, Archimandrite Moses, Abbot of Optina Hermitage, used to visit her to hear her instructions. In her cell he saw a watercolor portrait of Empress Elizabeth. Nun Dosithea directed him to Hieromonk Alexander of Novospassky Monastery and to his friend Archimandrite Philaret, both disciples of St. Paisius Velichkovsky. Novospassky Monastery was one of the centers disseminating mental activity. Thereafter, as advised by Mother Dosithea, the future Abbot of Optina set out for Sarov, where was struggling St. Seraphim, who gave him valuable instructions concerning the use of the Jesus Prayer during public church services.[6]

And thus, after a severely cold winter, new vegetation begins sprouting from the bowels of the earth: warm rains come gently down and everything breaks out in blossoms. The breath of the Holy Spirit leads to resurrection: a bright fragrant spring comes into its own.

Two strong personalities gave impetus to this resurrection: **St. Archimandrite Paisius Velichkovsky** (†1794),[7] outside the borders of Russia, resumed the teaching on spiritual prayer, while **Metropolitan Gabriel of St. Petersburg** (†1801)[8] created monastic communities, breeding-grounds from which this teaching

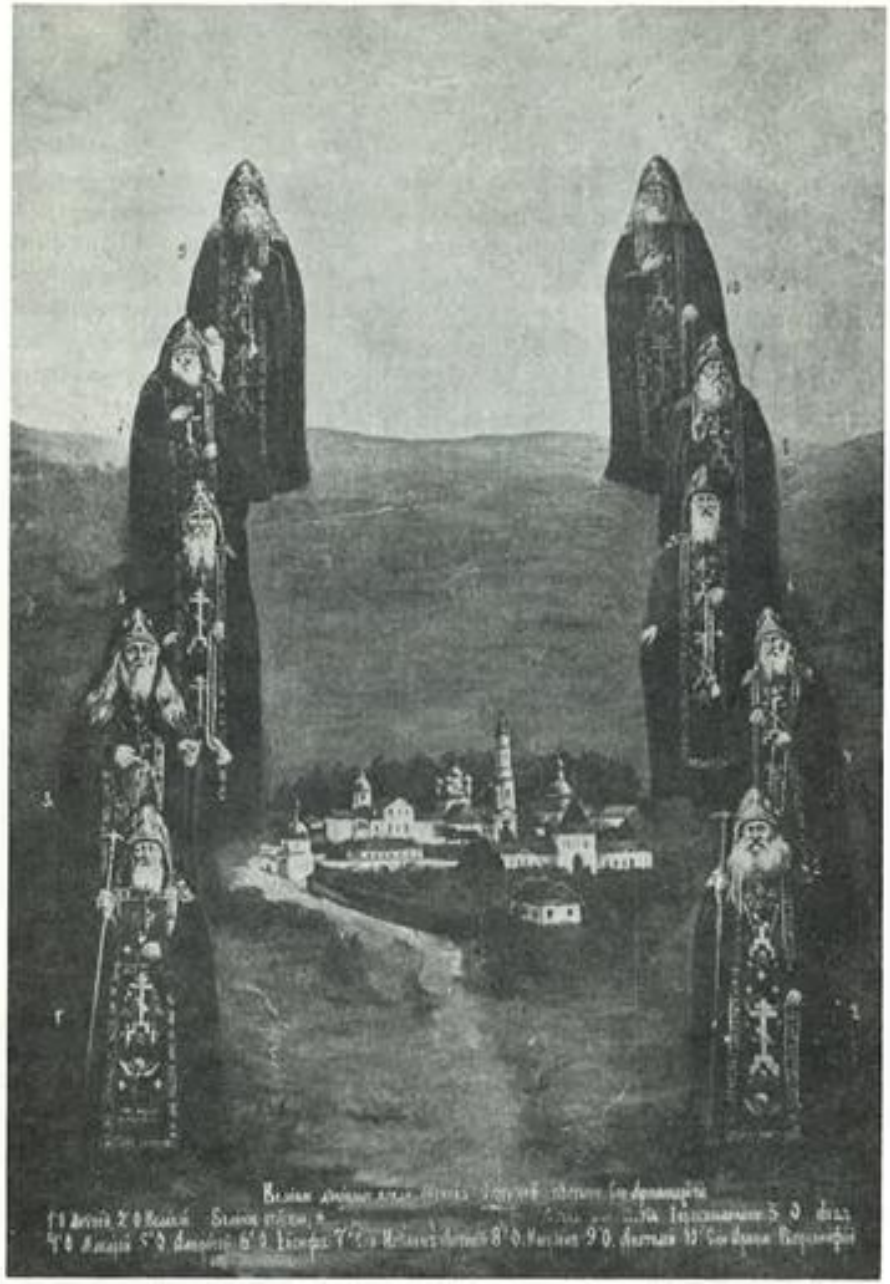
4. *Accounts of Lives of Russian Ascetics*, volume for September (Moscow, 1908).
5. Commemorated February 4.
6. Juvenal Polovtsev, *The Life of Archimandrite Moses* (Moscow, 1882), p. 7, etc.
7. Commemorated November 15.
8. Commemorated January 26.

METROPOLITAN GABRIEL OF PETERSBURG AND NOVGOROD

From The Russian Church in the 18th Century, *1905.*

could spread further. *The Philokalia*, translated by St. Paisius Velichkovsky and published in 1793 by Metropolitan Gabriel, was to form the basis of this spiritual movement. We shall examine this revival in our next study dealing with Optina Hermitage *(Optina Monastery and Its Era)*.[9] At this point, though, we shall glance ahead and give a general review of the new epoch, because it is organically bound with the previous period which we have already examined; this will help us to better evaluate it in connection with the general course of events.

9. I. M. Kontzevitch, *Optina Monastery and Its Era* (Jordanville, New York, 1970).



SYNAXIS OF A CENTURY OF GREAT OPTINA ELDERS

1) Moses, 2) Isaac, 3) Leonid, 4) Macarius, 5) Ambrose, 6) Joseph, 7) Anthony, 8) Hilarion, 9) Barsanuphius, and 10) Anatole.

From the cell of Fr. Adrian of New Diveyevo Convent, New York.

Chapter Two

The Spiritual Revival of the 19th Century and Optina Monastery

AND SO we have traced the path of the Russian saints of old and their "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" over the course of seven centuries. In the decline of her days, Byzantium passed the flame of the true Faith to Russia, and Russia preserved this flame to our own days, despite all the trials and temptations she was to endure. This is the merit of "Holy Russia" and her mission.

At the same time, we have observed a series of unfavorable historical circumstances which hindered the development of Russia's true enlightenment. However, as the Russian Empire grew and gained power, so did its enlightenment develop and become firmly established, until in the 19th century a powerful Russian culture began to emerge. And although this culture developed after Peter's reforms and in complete dependence on the West, the time of intellectual maturity was bound to come, when, through the persons of Russia's best thinkers, Russia could free herself from the process of imitation, become at long last aware of her national power as well as her historical aims and tasks, and embrace her own natural path. This unfolding of national consciousness was greatly enhanced by the spiritual fire of zeal which her saints of old brought to the Russian people. During the period of spiritual rebirth at the beginning of the 19th century, this fire turned into a bright flame, since the life-giving principle

contained in patristic tradition imparts creative energy and life to any sphere of thought and activity with which it comes in contact.

The rebirth of monasticism had all the wholeness of the spiritual life of the times of Sts. Sergius of Radonezh and Cyril of White Lake. This was manifested in the ascetic labor of anchorites who combined inward activity with service to the world (*i.e.*, in the combination of the two aspects of monastic life, which had been significantly weakened during the disputes on non-acquisition between Sts. Nilus of Sora and Joseph of Volokolamsk).[1] Optina Monastery, in particular, became the herald of this spiritual revival. Just as all paths leading to a mountain top converge on it, so too in Optina – the spiritual summit – there converged both the higher spiritual *podvig* of inward activity, which is crowned with an abundance of the gifts of grace through the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and service to the world, satisfying both its spiritual and everyday needs. Many came to see the Elders of Optina in search of consolation, healing, advice, guidance or instructions. The Optina Elders were visited by those who became entangled in the circumstances of their lives or philosophical quests. Like "deer searching for springs of water," men in their thirst for truth yearned to go to Optina. They all quenched their thirst at this source of "living water." The outstanding thinkers of the time, philosophers and writers visited Optina: Gogol, the Kireyevsky brothers, Leo and Aleksei Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Soloviev, Leontiev . . . and countless others. Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky became closer to Optina than all of them. At first indifferent to faith, he came to God through his wife, a spiritual daughter of St. Seraphim and Archimandrite Philaret of Novospassky Monastery. Having subsequently become the most devoted spiritual son of Elder Macarius of Optina, I. V. Kireyevsky was his chief collaborator in editing patristic literature. This enterprise was of utmost importance, since by force of the Spiritual Regulation of Peter I and the decrees of 1787 and 1808, the publishing of spiritual books was left to the discretion of the Holy Synod; and according to the censorship regulation of 1804 they could be printed only in the printing house dealing with spiritual literature. Only one book on asceticism, *The Philokalia*, was published in 1793, as directed by the Holy Synod.[2] Only church service books were published. Thus, readers were deprived of spiritual literature. For instance, the works of St. Isaac the Syrian could be obtained only in handwritten copies or in a foreign edition of St. Paisius Velichkovsky, which was a rarity. At the same time, the secular press produced a great number of translations of pseudo-mystical Western works, and many of them, printed

1. See above: "Characteristics of the 15th Century."
2. *An Historical Account of Optina Monastery* (Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, 1902), p. 85.

ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

From the Kontzevitch photograph collection.

with the permission of the civil censors, were directly hostile to Orthodoxy. This being the situation, the proposed publication of patristic literature was an enterprise of historical significance. It was realized only due to the patronage of the wise Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow. This work brought together the spiritually-minded intellectuals. Among the participants in the project were Professors Shevyrev, Pogodin and Maximovitch, the writer N. V. Gogol, the Kireyevsky brothers, Burachek (the publisher of *The Lighthouse*), Askochensky, Norov, A. N. Muraviev, and later L. Kavelin (Archimandrite Leonid), Karl Sederholm (Fr. Clement) and T. I. Filippov.[3] The center of this project was Optina Monastery, and its soul, initiator and head was Elder Macarius in the closest collaboration with I. V. Kireyevsky, who helped through his knowledge of both the Greek language and philosophical terminology. Both Kireyevsky and his wife corrected the proofs, and most of the books were financed by them.

Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky was thoroughly familiar with patristic teaching, as well as with the West and its culture, having received his higher philosophical education in Germany.

In the person of Kireyevsky, the Western philosophical tradition met with the tradition of the Eastern Church. What, then, was the outcome of the encounter of these two hostile principles?

In Optina, Kireyevsky observed the realization of patristic wisdom. Being a philosopher, he sensed that higher knowledge of truth is bound with wholeness of the spirit, with a restored harmony of all the spiritual powers of man. This restoration, however, may only be attained through inward *podvig*, through spiritual activity. In his philosophical research – in epistemology, to be precise – I. Kireyevsky pointed to an inner dependence (functional bond) of man's cognitive powers on his spiritual *podvig*, which changes man's natural, lower state of reason into a higher spiritual reason. (In other words, Kireyevsky combined philosophy with asceticism.)[4]

Being trained in the West, and knowing it to perfection, Kireyevsky was harshly critical of its culture. The West had reached a spiritual dead-end. The spiritual disease of Western culture was the "triumph of rationalism." In this lies the essence of Western culture. "The accusation of rationalism brought against the whole West arose in the West itself in the 18th century, both in

3. All these individuals were literary contributors to the project and also enjoyed the spiritual guidance of the Elders. Gogol wrote to Optina: "For Christ's sake, pray for me: every moment of my life my thoughts must be above everyday squabbles, and wherever my wanderings take me, my spirit must remain in Optina Monastery." *An Historical Account of Optina Monastery*, p. 102.

4. Kireyevsky's teaching on man and knowledge will be discussed in greater detail below.

ARCHIMANDRITE LEONID KAVELIN

An Optina monk who was the disciple and biographer of Elder Macarius.

Germany and in France."[5] Kireyevsky spoke of this malady of the West in greater detail: "European enlightenment has now achieved the plenitude of its development, but the result of this plenitude has been an almost universal feeling of discontent and betrayed hope. The very triumph of the European mind has revealed the one-sidedness of its fundamental aspirations. . . . Life itself has been deprived of essential meaning."[6] "The cold analysis of many centuries has destroyed the foundations upon which, from the very beginning of its development, European enlightenment has rested. As a consequence, its own basic principles (*i.e.*, those of Christianity) have become strange and alien to it. And this analysis which has destroyed its roots – this self-propelling knife of reason, this syllogism, recognizing nothing except itself and individual experience, this despotic rationality, this logical activity, – is cut off from all man's other cognitive powers" (vol. II, p. 232). "The Western world, just as the East, originally lived by faith, but faith itself was impaired when Rome placed syllogisms above the consciousness of the whole of Christianity" (II, 285). Kireyevsky showed that this impairment resulted in the "development, first, of scholastic philosophy within faith, then of a Reformation of faith, and finally of philosophy outside of faith" (II, 284). "The Western Church substituted the outward authority of its hierarchy for the inner authority of truth (when arbitrarily and without the consent of the East it changed the Symbol of Faith)." This "has led to . . . rationalism, *i.e.*, the triumph of an autonomous reason,"[7] which in turn has led to the inevitable disintegration of spiritual wholeness. "Dualism and rationality are the ultimate expressions of Western culture."[8]

The West overlooked Eastern wisdom. Its scholars mastered in detail all the ancient philosophies: Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Hindu, etc. But the mysticism of the Orthodox East was closed to them. Russia, on the other hand, inherited from Byzantium great treasures of this spiritual wisdom contained in the writings of the Holy Fathers. Hence, Russia's historical task was to build on the rich Byzantine heritage a new spiritual culture which would impregnate the whole world. Kireyevsky posed the problem in all its fulness. According to him, Russian philosophy was to be built on "the deep, living and pure love for wisdom of the Church Fathers which is the embryo of the higher philosophic principle" (II, 332).

5. Archpriest V. V. Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I (Paris, 1948), p. 230.

6. Kireyevsky, *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 231. (Further quotations will be marked in the text.)

7. Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*. Vol. I, p. 230.

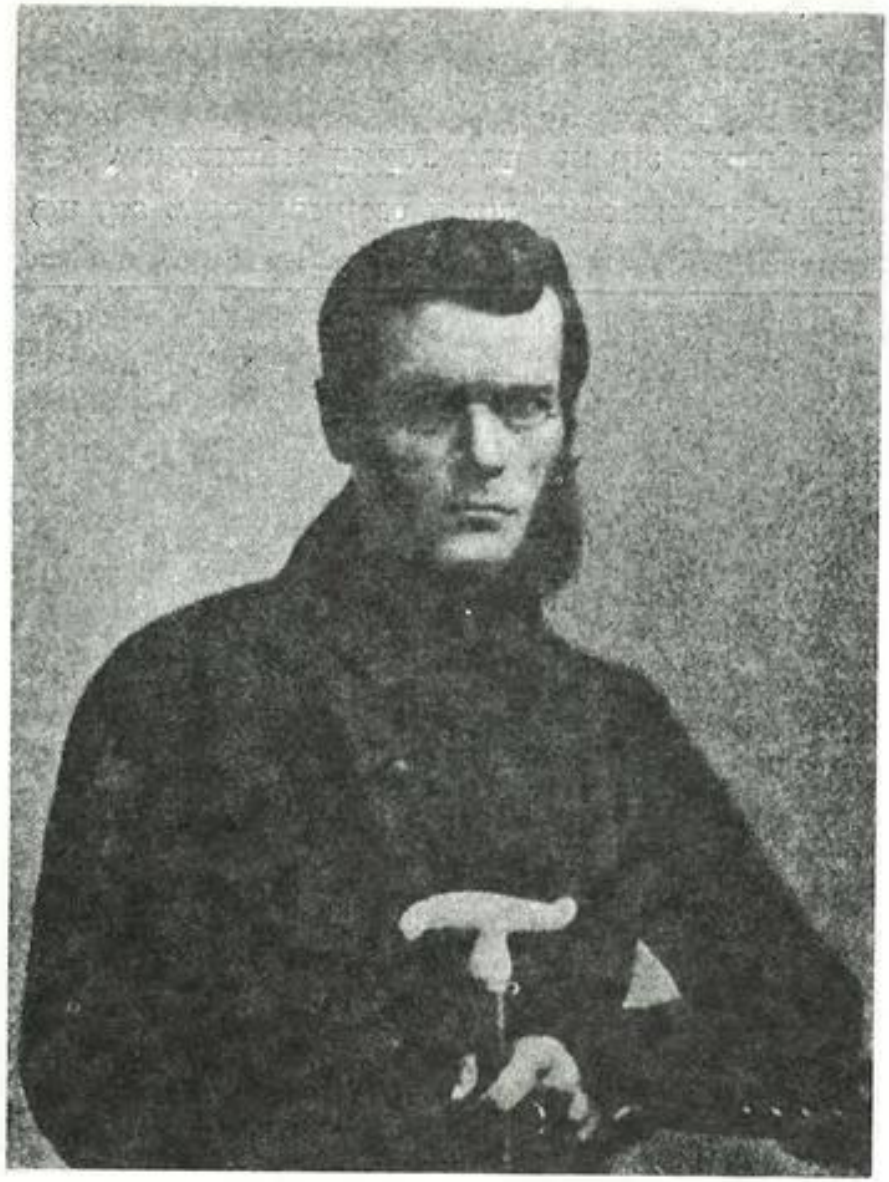
8. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

OPTINA MONASTERY TODAY

A view from the waters of the Zhizdra River. In front is one of the towers which stand at the four corners of the monastery, and behind the trees is the monastery itself.

"The task of Russian philosophy is not to reject Western thought, but to supplement it with what is revealed in higher spiritual vision – the living experience of 'higher knowledge' – in which wholeness of spirit, which was lost in the Fall and impaired by the triumph of logical thought in Western Christianity, is recovered."[9]

9. *Ibid.*, p. 230.



IVAN V. KIREYEVSKY
(1806-1856)

Chapter Three

THE ANTHROPOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF IVAN KIREYEVSKY

THIS TEACHING of Kireyevsky must be examined in connection with asceticism (see Part I). It is directly related to asceticism, connecting it with philosophy and affirming the eternal meaning of ascetic endeavors.

In his teaching on the soul, Kireyevsky pointed to its hierarchical structure. At the foundation of his teaching he placed "ancient Christian anthropological dualism,"[1] the distinction between an "outer" and "inner" man. Using the language of contemporary psychology, he distinguished between the "empirical sphere of the psyche," and its many aspects on a deeper level lying below the threshold of consciousness, the central point of which may be called the "inward focal self." These are the powers of the spirit which have been relegated by sin to the depths of man beyond the threshold of consciousness, this being the reason for the loss of the original wholeness which conceals in itself the very root of individuality and its specific quality. These powers, this inner man, is closed off to the consciousness as a result of the power of sin. By overcoming sin and "concentrating" the powers of the soul, man should strive to unite his empirical sphere with the inner center, the "inward focal self," subordinating this empirical sphere to himself. "The chief character of

1. Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, p. 222.

believing thought," says Kireyevsky in this remarkable passage, "consists in the striving to concentrate all the separate powers of the soul into a single power, to seek out that inner focus of being where reason, will, feeling and conscience, the beautiful and the true, the wonderful and the desirable, the just and the merciful, and the whole sweep of the mind, are fused together into one living unity, thus *restoring* the essential personality in its original indivisibility" (II, 337). In this restored wholeness of powers, the hierarchical primacy belongs to man's moral sphere; and the health of all the other aspects and specific qualities of his soul depends on the health of the moral sphere.[2]

Kireyevsky expressed the basic problem of his doctrine of epistemology as follows: "The understanding with which man apprehends the Divine also serves him for apprehending the truth in general" (II, 306). In other words – "the apprehension of reality is a function of the knowledge of God."[3]

This important aspect of cognition of the soul forms the basis of Kireyevsky's epistemological constructions, and provides a key towards understanding the latter. "In the very depths of human reason, in its very nature, lies the possibility of the consciousness of one's fundamental relationship to God" (II, 322), *i.e.*, faith. Faith, the knowledge of God, is a deep, mysterious union, not only of man's spirit, but also of his entire personality, with God – the only highest and true reality.

Similarly, the understanding of the secondary, created reality has to do not only with reason, but with "one's whole being and one's whole participation in reality." The depth of cognition, the possibility of "possessing reality" and the truth which is concealed in it, is determined not by cognition alone, but "by the luminosity of understanding, its realization in man's 'inward focal self.' "[4] This is possible only in the wholeness of the spirit, in the gathering of all its powers.

But the Fall caused the impairment of the structure of the soul. Although faith, too, was impaired and relegated to the depth of the soul, it still preserved the power to restore the lost wholeness of the spirit. And in so far as faith has been preserved in the inward focus of the spirit, it restores the natural functioning of the mind and "makes the mind understand that it has deviated from its moral wholeness; and this understanding helps us to rise above the 'natural' course of activity," *i.e.*, to rise above the 'natural' state. "For the Orthodox believer knows that the wholeness of the truth requires the wholeness of the mind, and the quest for this wholeness constitutes the constant task of his thinking"(II, 311). . . . "Thus, where faith is present, a 'dual activity' goes on in the thought of the believer: in following the development of his understanding, he simultaneously follows the method of this thinking" (*i.e.*, he controls the correctness of its activity), "constantly striving to raise his reason to a level where it can sympathize with faith" (II, 312). Thus, the corruption of our mind which resulted when it turned away from the wholeness of its primary nature is repaired by what faith brings into our spirit. This does not mean violence to the mind, which would undermine its freedom and creative powers, but the raising of reason from a lower level to a higher.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
4. *Ibid.*

"Living truths are not those which constitute dead capital in the mind of man, which lie on the surface of his mind and may be acquired through external learning, but those which kindle the soul, which may burn or become extinguished, which impart life to life, which are preserved in the secrecy of heart and may not, by their nature, be obvious and common to all. When expressed in words, they remain unnoticed; when expressed in deeds, they remain incomprehensible to those who have not experienced their direct contact" (II, 340). To know the truth must be to dwell in the truth; in other words, this involves not just the mind, but the whole life. "Living" knowledge is acquired in the degree to which one aspires inwardly to moral elevation and wholeness, and it disappears when this aspiration ceases, leaving in the soul only its outward, formal aspect. Thus "spiritual enlightenment," in contrast to logical knowledge, is bound with the moral state of the soul, and as such it requires effort and moral intensity. "It may become extinguished if the fire which has kindled it is not continuously fed" (II, 327). Abstract knowledge alone entails "tearing away from reality, and man himself becomes an abstract entity" (II, 305). The break with reality begins in the sphere of faith. Malady of the spirit, disintegration of its strength, is, first of all, reflected in the sphere of faith and results in "abstract thinking." "Logical thought, separated from the other cognitive powers, is the natural characteristic of a mind which has fallen away from its wholeness" (I, 276). This falling away of reason causes also the loss of higher cognition bound with faith; and "natural reason" inevitably sinks below the level of its "primary nature." The break with spiritual powers, this "amorality" of Western enlightenment, gives it an odd stability, whereas spiritual knowledge is dynamic by nature, and directly dependent on the continuously changing state of the moral sphere.

Such is Kireyevsky's solution to the basic problem of epistemology: the inward union of faith and reason. As mentioned before, he drew his inspiration from the Church Fathers. Their doctrine of the levels of reason, as expounded by St. Demetrius of Rostov, further elucidates the doctrine of cognition.

1. Reason that is uncultivated and for a long time unpurified is an unreasonable reason, an iniquitous and untrue reason. There are distinctions in reason, as in all other external things. There is a perfect, spiritual reason, there is an average reason of the soul, and there is a rather coarse carnal reason.
2. The one who will not care to personally follow the narrow Evangelical path, and will neglect to purify his mind, is blind of soul, even if he has mastered all external wisdom; he keeps only to the letter that kills, without accepting the spirit that gives life.
3. Right and true reason cannot penetrate deeply into the soul without great and prolonged effort and labor; for to the degree that man's lusts are mortified, to that degree does true reason grow and flourish. But this ascetic labor must be of a particular kind; it must consist of external effort and mental activity. The one is not effected without the other.
4. All those who have complied with the instructions pertaining to external labor while neglecting inward spiritual activity — the enlightenment and purification of reason — have lost their senses, have become corrupted by various passions, or have fallen into pernicious heresies. *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient* (Rom. 1:28).
5. The mind that is purified and enlightened can understand everything external and internal, because then the person is spiritual and *judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man* (I Cor. 2:15).[5]

Philosophy is the science of the apprehension of truth. But truth is one. *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*, says the Lord (John 14:6). This Way is the only one for philosophical thought as well; whoever follows a different path — *climbeth up some other way* (John 10:1).

A laden camel could only with difficulty and on its knees squeeze through the low and narrow gate of Jerusalem called the "needle's eye," but despite all efforts, it is even more difficult for a thinker rich in *science falsely so called* (I Tim. 6:20) to enter God's Kingdom of truth and spiritual freedom: *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (II Cor. 3:17). *If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:31-32).

5. *The Spiritual Alphabet* of St. Demetrius of Rostov, pp. 38-43. I. M. Kontzevitch wrote a whole treatise on St. Demetrius of Rostov, which was published in *Pravoslavny Put (The Orthodox Way)*, although not totally in its original form *(editor)*.

Based on the law of the dynamics of knowledge and its organic bond with the spiritual sphere, Kireyevsky assumes that the decline of the "indigenous Russian enlightenment," although it occurred in unfavorable external circumstances, was "not free of man's inner fault." "An aspiration towards external formality, which we observe in Russian Old-Believers, gives cause to think that the initial direction of Russian enlightenment became weakened already before the upheavals caused by Peter" (II, 327). At this point it is important to note that Kireyevsky places the beginning of this decline in the 15th and 16th centuries, which coincides with the beginning of the decline in spiritual activity, according to our own research.

Thus, Kireyevsky marked the beginning of a new inspired philosophy of the "wholeness of spirit," which could have formed the basis for an understanding of the development of an original indigenous Russian culture.

In Kireyevsky, Russian self-awareness already reached its full revelation. Russian thought was becoming free of its centuries-long captivity to alien principles and stepping out onto its initial independent path, turning to its primary sources. It was returning to the "father's house." But Kireyevsky did not have time to complete the task he envisioned — to write a philosophy; he only laid its foundation and indicated its direction. Death carried him away in the prime of his life. He was buried in Optina Monastery, next to Elder Leonid. Elder Macarius died soon thereafter. Everything that transpired in Optina had a mysterious meaning. Metropolitan Philaret himself was amazed at the honor shown to Kireyevsky.[6]

6. Kireyevsky's life was the confirmation of his teaching. His close friend Khomiakov said of him: "A heart full of tenderness and love; a mind enriched by the culture of our contemporary epoch; the translucent purity of a meek soul free of malice; a particular softness of feeling, which added a special charm to his conversation; a fervent yearning for truth; unusual dialectical refinement in arguments, accompanied by the most honest tractability when his opponent was right, and tender mercy when his opponent was obviously weak; aversion to everything coarse and abrasive in life, in expression and thought, or in relations with other people; loyalty and devotion in friendship; readiness always to forgive enemies and to be sincerely reconciled with them; deep hatred of vices and, finally, an irreproachable dignity which did not allow any blemish or suspicion to be linked with it, but which sincerely suffered from any meanness observed in other people. Such were the rare and invaluable qualities of Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky." *Russian Biographical Dictionary* (St. Petersburg, 1897), p. 695.

CONSTANTINE LEONTIEV
in monasticism Monk Clement of Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra.

Chapter Four

Other Renowned Visitors of Optina Monastery

THE WRITERS and philosophers of the next generation, although they visited Optina, could not fully embrace its original spirit.

It might have seemed that Vladimir Soloviev was the man to continue Kireyevsky's cause. Indeed, in his master's thesis, "The Crisis of Western Philosophy," he adopted Kireyevsky's world-view in its entirety: "the synthesis of philosophy and religion, the view on Western philosophy as a development of rationalism, the ideas on the wholeness of life, on metaphysical knowledge. . . . But he [Soloviev] excluded all Russian messianic motives and opposed Western thought not with Russian Orthodoxy, but with hazy speculations of the (non-Christian) East." And in his subsequent creative writings Vladimir Soloviev remained not only outside "the love of wisdom of the Holy Fathers," but outside Orthodoxy as well: he imagined himself to be above confessional divisions and used to say that he was a Protestant rather than a Catholic. He accepted the idea of salvation the Protestant way: through faith rather than through deeds. Hence his rejection of spiritual [ascetic] activity: "sin continuously and never repent."[1] It followed, naturally, that he did not connect the knowledge of truth with the state of the moral sphere and the wholeness of the spirit, as Kireyevsky did. Thus, due to his extraordinary impact upon his contempories, and having at first taken advantage of Kireyevsky's ideology, Soloviev diverted the awakening Russian religious thought from the path indicated by Kireyevsky.

In Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* we find only an external description approximating what Dostoyevsky saw in Optina Monastery. The character

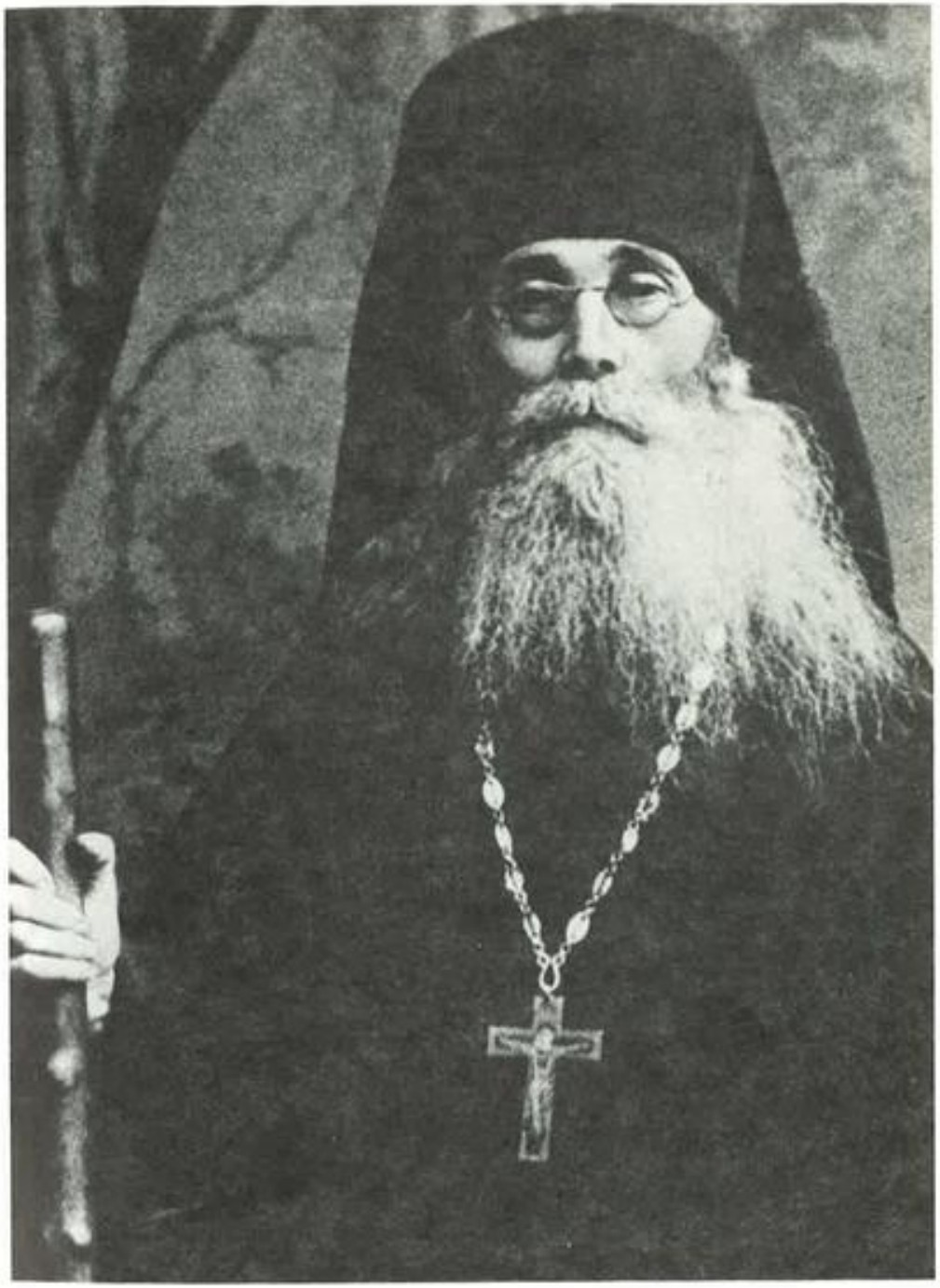
1. K. Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev*, second edition (Paris, 1951), pp. 54 and 254.

of Elder Zosima was not at all copied from Elder Ambrose, as has been assumed by some.

Closer in his heart to Optina Monastery than any others was Constantine Leontiev, who took secret tonsure. He lived there for several years, and there he freed himself of the yoke of the errors and sins of his youth, which he redeemed by illnesses and sincere repentance. Leontiev was an artist of the word [a writer] and an outstanding Russian thinker, as testified by his profound understanding of contemporary life and its problems and by his prophetic insight into Russia's fate. In his ideology Leontiev advocated Greek-Russian Orthodoxy, maintaining that the essence of Russian Orthodoxy in no way differed from that of Byzantium. The conclusions we reached on Russian sanctity in our research find their support also in Leontiev's words: ". . . Byzantine culture in general possesses all the main types of the sanctity which Russian people used as their models. . . . " "Athonite life, formed by the creative genius of Byzantine Greeks, served as a model for our first Kievan Saints, Anthony and Theodosius. . . . " "Inspired by sincere faith and by long service as a consul among Eastern Christians, I understood almost immediately that I personally cannot be saved outside the Orthodox Faith; that without the strictest protection of Orthodox discipline, the State of Russia would go to ruin even before many other states; and, finally, that we should be looking for the original features of our culture in *our Greek-Russian ancient roots*. . . ."[2]

Of all the Russian thinkers who communicated with the Elders of Optina, Leo Tolstoy was the most remote from its spirit. Owing to Tolstoy's extreme pride, Fr. Ambrose always found it difficult to communicate with him; such conversations tired the Elder. After his excommunication from the Church, Tolstoy no longer came to see the Elders. Once, having come up to the skete, he stopped; it was as if some invisible power detained him at the holy gates. He was obviously struggling with the passion of pride; he tried again, but still was undecided and again he went away. For the third time he approached the skete in still greater hesitation, then sharply turned around and quickly went away; he never again attempted to enter the skete. Only in the last days of his life, having apparently sensed his approaching end and the inevitability of God's judgment, Tolstoy left his home and rushed to Optina, but was overtaken by his followers. When Elder Barsanuphius arrived at the Astapovo station, as instructed by the Holy Synod, to offer reconciliation and appeasement to the dying man, he was not admitted to him by the same followers. To the end of his life, Fr. Barsanuphius could not think of this trip without agitation and pain.

2. Constantine Leontiev, *Works*, Vol. VI, "Letters to V. Soloviev" (Moscow, 1902), pp. 332-333, 337.



ELDER BARSANUPHIUS OF OPTINA

THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. BASIL THE FOOL-FOR-CHRIST IN MOSCOW

A 19th-century photograph.

Chapter Five

Architecture and Iconography as a Sign of the Times

THE SIGNIFICANCE of Russian iconography as an art form entered the consciousness of Russians only in the period of 1905-1914. In 1913 in Moscow there was organized the first national Exhibition of Icons. Prince E. Trubetskoy delivered a series of excellent lectures disclosing the meaning of the ancient Russian "world-view in colors." "Discovering the meaning of iconography," he said, "we experience a mixed feeling, where great joy goes hand in hand with a profound inner pain. To understand what we had in our painting of old means, at the same time, to feel what we have lost in it. The thought that this immortal monument of spiritual greatness belongs to our distant past contains also something infinitely alarming for our present. The loss becomes immediately obvious at the first attempt to compare the old and the new in church architecture. It is precisely in the architecture of old that we have the most vivid portrayal of the way of life of Holy Russia. The eye rejoices at the sight of the ancient cathedrals in Novgorod, Pskov and the Moscow Kremlin, for each line of the simple and noble forms is reminiscent of the fire that once burned in our souls.

"We feel that, in ancient Russia, the form of the onion-dome represented the building not only of churches, but of everything that lived a spiritual life — the entire Church and all secular levels close to her, from Tsar to ploughman.

"In ancient Russian churches, not only the church domes but all the apses and arches over the outside walls and even external ornaments pointed

The Moscow Kremlin riverside in winter, with the Christ the Savior Cathedral in the distance. *A 19th-century postcard printed in Stockholm.*

A photograph of the Christ the Savior Cathedral, Moscow, before its destruction in 1938.

upwards and often assumed the shape of bulbs. Sometimes these shapes formed a pyramid of a bulb narrowing at the top. In this general upward motion towards the cross, *everything pursued a flame*, everything strove to emulate the shape of a flame and became pointed in gradual ascent. Only upon reaching the point of contact of the two worlds at the foot of the cross did this fiery quest break out in a bright flame and fuse with the gold of the heavens. . . . The entire sense of the existence of 'Holy Russia' was concentrated in this fiery flash. In the radiance of her church domes she had found a vivid portrayal of her own image, as if in anticipation of the image of God, which was to reveal itself in Russia."

Further, Prince Trubetskoy pointed to the abyss of downfall separating that image from his contemporary Russia, which was building churches with fiery enthusiasm, churches crowned with 'domes horrifyingly reminiscent of household utensils' and 'mechanical,' like chimneys attached to the roofs of the church buildings. He explained such degeneration of church architecture by spiritual indifference, by a "dense pedestrianism" about to overshadow the world. Everything in architecture speaks now of earthly concerns, "everything expresses an unusually flat and commonplace view of the world." Utilitarianism is not given to see the depths. Neither the grandeur of goodness nor the abyss of evil are accessible to it; it personifies "the domestic, average milieu." However, "this utilitarianism," says Trubetskoy, "is not at all as neutral as may seem at first glance: out of its bowels are born blood-thirsty crimes and wars. Comfort breeds traitors. The sale of one's own soul and country for thirty pieces of silver, manifest transactions with Satan, who tries to encroach upon the Holy of Holies of our Church — this is what the satisfied ideal of pedestrian prosperity ultimately leads to."[1]

The religious art of old directly reflected the state of the human spirit. Art was the pulse of life, it was a tangible symptom of spiritual enthusiasm or decline. Thus, the time of high spiritual enthusiasm in Russian history — the 14th and 15th centuries — is linked with the names of such great icon-painters as St. Andrew Rublev, etc.

As to more recent times, the mere possibility of such a harsh criticism of the art of the period of decline, as we have observed in the person of Prince E. Trubetskoy, bears witness to the fact that Russian thought has reached the maturity to understand the truth. And this may be bound up with the spiritual rebirth which we have mentioned. In ecclesiastical art of recent times there was a turn towards the ancient models (the Cathedral of the Theodore Icon of

1. Prince E. Trubetskoy, *Two Worlds in Ancient Russian Iconography* (Moscow, 1916), pp. 27-32.

The wall of Rostov the Great.

the Mother of God in Tsarskoe Selo, built in 1913, and in the Convent of Sts. Mary and Martha of Grand-Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna); and in the life of the State there were indications of return to original Russian principles. "The tendency of the last reigns," says Professor A. V. Kartashev, "prognosticated the reestablishment of the canonical Orthodox statute of monarchs as sons of the Church. The anti-canonical Synodal system also stood at the threshold of its historical death."[2] Things were moving towards the reestablishment of the Patriarchate, thus marking the imminent return to the concept of "symphony."

However, this spiritual rebirth was limited to a narrow sphere of influence and could not embrace the whole country. The majority followed, on their own momentum, the well-trodden path of the destruction of spiritual principles. And by the 20th century, the dichotomy which reigned in all spheres of life in Russia could no longer be overcome.

2. Kartashev, *Holy Rus' in Russia*.

Author's Note

In the present research, a great deal of material had to be abridged or omitted altogether due to technical and financial considerations. Thus, the first Part, "A Brief Survey of Asceticism," is an abridged version of two chapters on eldership and asceticism. The Part dealing with the enlightenment of ancient Russia and its character in various periods is left out completely, although it touches upon a series of important problems. We tried in this Part [on enlightenment] to penetrate to the roots of Russia's ancient spiritual-cultural life, to elucidate the inner process of its formation and development, retracing the struggle between two principles: the Western and Eastern. We tried to understand why Russia did not succeed in its natural culture, which could have been formed, according to Professor Koyalovich, from cultural elements coming from Western Russia (Kiev), combined with Greek elements. These elements were strong enough to satisfy the actual cultural needs of Russia even in the later 18th century – despite Peter's radical break with the ancient Russian tenor of life.

In the process of studying materials on enlightenment, much data was accumulated on the associated topic of Russia's historical calling and the aims of its government, as they were understood in various epochs. The leitmotif here is the wavering between the natural Eastern Orthodox concept of Russia's calling and Russia's leanings towards Western principles. This duality continuously prevented Russia from combining its efforts towards the realization of these spiritual and public aims and tasks, particularly at the times when historical circumstances were favorable. This duality continuously shook our ancient foundations of governmental life.

1. M. O. Koyalovich, *History of Russian Self-Awareness* (St. Petersburg, 1901), p. 313.

THE NEW MARTYRS OF RUSSIA

The glory of 20th-century Russian sanctity.
Around the border are depicted various tortures which the martys suffered.
The Saints in the circles, Seraphim of Sarov and John of Kronstadt, were prophets of the age of Russian martyrdom.

Icon by N. Papkov.

EPILOGUE

BY THE EDITORS

THIS BOOK ends abruptly, without actually making a chronological conclusion, and may leave the reader with the impression that the author had little to say about the 20th-century hesychastic experience of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. First of all, the reader must keep in mind that this book is actually a manifesto of the author's beliefs, hopes and ideals. He himself – along with his wife, brother and many contemporaries – was a living carrier of the spirit of *Acquisition*. The book was, so to speak, the swan song of his life, because in it he said everything he had to say. In some sense, it was autobiographical. But since, according to a Russian saying, "the end of one's life is its crown," he could not yet speak on how the "autobiography" would end. He could not of course publicly write about his own acquisition of the Holy Spirit: his own righteous death, as well as his wife Helen's twenty-four years of preparation (literary and spiritual) for death. This may explain why this book ends so abruptly.

In the process of leading a conscientious spiritual life, adhering to the principles of sobriety, man acquires a mystical, personal language between his Creator, his own soul, the God-created world in which he lives, the fallen spirits and the ever-persistent force of the flesh. This mystery cannot be clearly spelled out for public consumption, and is perceptible to the reader only to the measure of his own experience. It is no wonder, then, that the autobiographical aspect of this historical panorama of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit is not outwardly apparent. We, however, who watched the author's last six years and the last twenty-four years of his wife can testify that the content of this historical survey was subjectively known to the authors themselves. To fully develop this point would require a lengthy biography, which is being prepared by the editors based on letters and autobiographical notes.

19th-century Russia experienced a great spiritual revival thanks to the generations of disciples of St. Paisius Velichkovsky. Such an outpouring of grace was not rivaled in previous centuries in Holy Russia. St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. John of Kronstadt, Blessed Theophil of the Kiev Caves and others were in the highest degree acquirers of the Holy Spirit. There were hundreds of other men and women in the 19th century who should have been canonized, but their memory lies dormant behind the Iron Curtain of the Communist Yoke. A mere external investigation leads one to a whole realm of holiness that was poured out on the Russian land.

On his deathbed, Professor Kontzevitch revealed to me that his project of writing a Trilogy, of which the present book was intended to be the first volume, was actually left undone due to his infirmity. I promised him to help his wife complete the project. The second volume was to contain a survey of acquirers of the Holy Spirit, but only a short article was written for it, to be included in the proposed third volume, dedicated to Optina Monastery.

In this volume on Optina, the author's wife and I encompassed the spirituality of the 20th century, ending up with the *prima vita* of Elder Nectarius, the author's spiritual father. The author had not intended to include a survey of the 20th century, owing to his modesty in having been so closely involved in its greatest manifestations of sanctity. Being himself a part of the Age of Martyrdom in the 20th century — during which his father was killed and his relatives suffered severe persecution for the Faith — he left the final survey to us.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Orthodox Christianity was already placed in the context of growing anti-Christian fervency. The hundreds of holy men and women who were alive and continued the almost 1,000-year tradition were expecting an age of trial and testing of their spiritual strength. This indeed occurred at the hands of ruthless God-fighters, who eventually took over the secular authority with the 1917 Revolution. A decade later (with Metropolitan Sergius' Declaration of 1927) they enslaved the external church organization, leaving freedom of spirit to exist only in the catacomb mentality. Thus was the sanctity of the acquirers of the Holy Spirit proved genuine. Outwardly, of course, they were cruelly exterminated, but this only resulted in a host of saints — the New Martyrs of Russia. Their full significance is yet to be revealed. There is, however, enough indication that the ascetic spirit of the God-pleasers of old was alive in these martyrs and their co-sufferers.[1] Further,

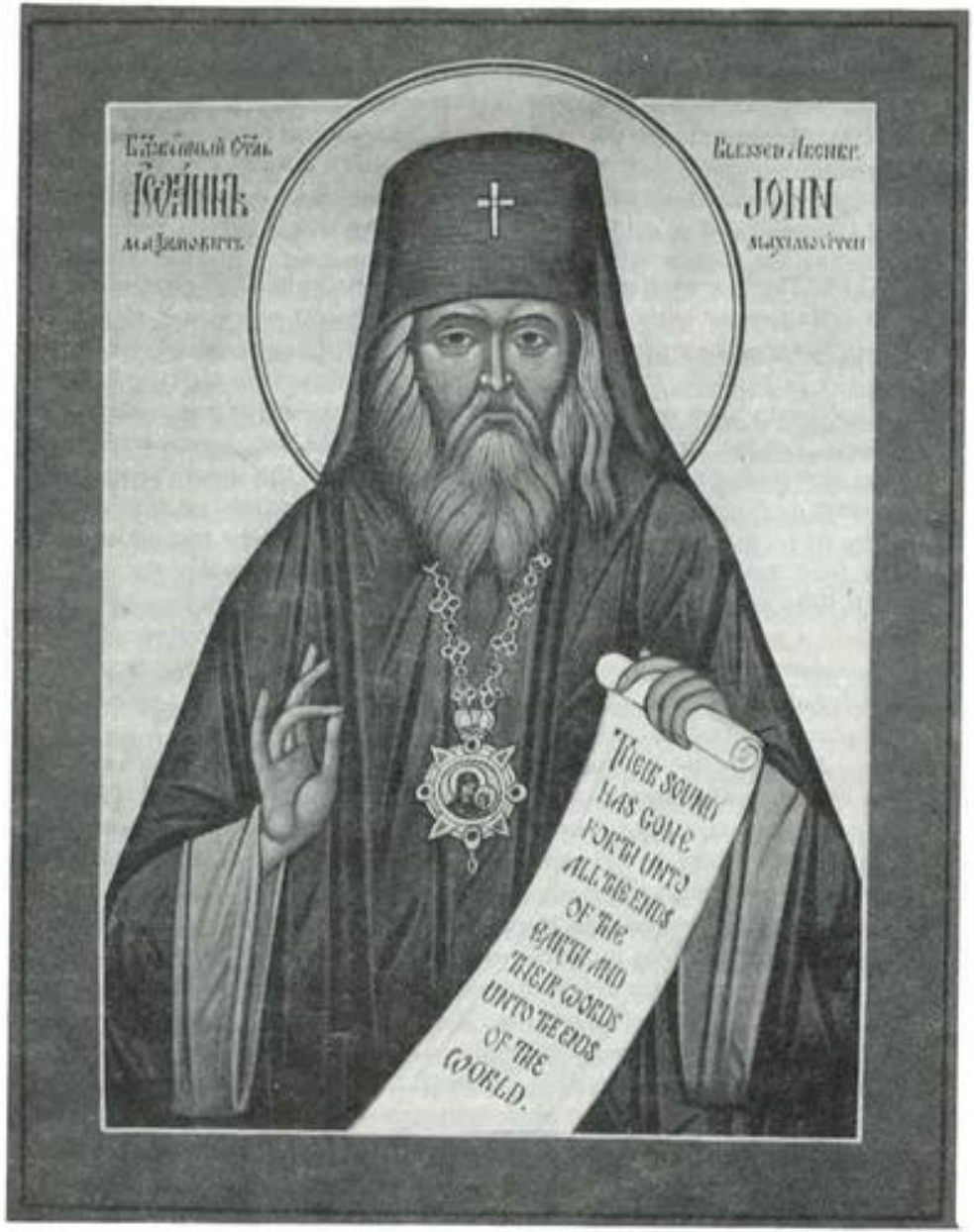
1. Besides the three-volume 20th-century Martyrologian by Priest Michael Polsky (Jordanville, 1949, 1957, third volume still in manuscript) and Prof. I. M. Andreyev's *Russian Catacomb Saints* (in English; Platina, 1982), there is a work being compiled on the Lives of 20th-century Russian ascetics, modeled after the fourteen-volume work by New Hieromartyr Nikodim of Belgorod (Moscow, St. Panteleimon's Monastery Press, 1906-1916). This work will contain over 100 biographies, including those of 19th-century ascetics who were overlooked by Bishop Nikodim. If anyone is in possession of related literature, please contact the St. Herman Brotherhood.

considering the unprecedented spiritual revival that is taking place in Russia today, it is evident that this spirit has been transmitted to new generations and that, behind a still-present emotional "iron curtain," spiritual giants lie concealed.

As for the three waves of Russian emigrants who brought the ancient spirit of *Acquisition* to the free world, one can say the following:

1. The first wave contained those who were appalled at the unquestionably anti-Christian spirit of Communism. They chose freedom, and many of them conducted their lives according to the ancient principles. In encountering the spirit of the West — which actually inflicted Communism upon Holy Russia — they sought ways to reach out to the apostate world with the message of holiness. For the most part they were not heard, and were regarded only as dying branches of a world that has lived out its values. This in turn dampened the spirit of the common goal of witnessing the Truth, and resulted in an atmosphere of ecclesiastical fragmentation. It undermined the very purpose of the exile from Russia, which was to spread Orthodoxy to the ends of the world. But in spite of their being largely ignored, this first wave of emigrants was able to make a monastic presence somewhat felt in the free world, creating a series of monastic centers which carried the banner of asceticism and missionary zeal. It included the Elders of Old Valaam and holy Hierarchs such as Archbishops Theophan of Poltava and John Maximovitch.

2. The second wave was the result of the Second World War. The presence of these emigrants promised to demonstrate to the free world that Communism was inhuman and destructive to civilization. These victims of war had actually been spiritually enhanced by the martyric experience of the 1930's. Among them were such outstanding representatives of Holy Russia as Fr. Adrian (later Archbishop Andrew) and Hierarchs Leonty and Nektary, as well as a host of people who had been in contact with New Martyrs. Their spirit was strong because they were among those who, according to the words of Christ's promise, had forsaken much for the sake of the Kingdom of God. They created monasteries and deposited sanctity, especially in America, where new generations of converts have since taken over. Although the new generation is still feeble and uncertain of its strength, it nevertheless puts to use the principles of Orthodox asceticism.



BLESSED ARCHBISHOP JOHN MAXIMOVITCH
(1896-1966)
One of the greatest representatives of Holy Russia in the 20th century.

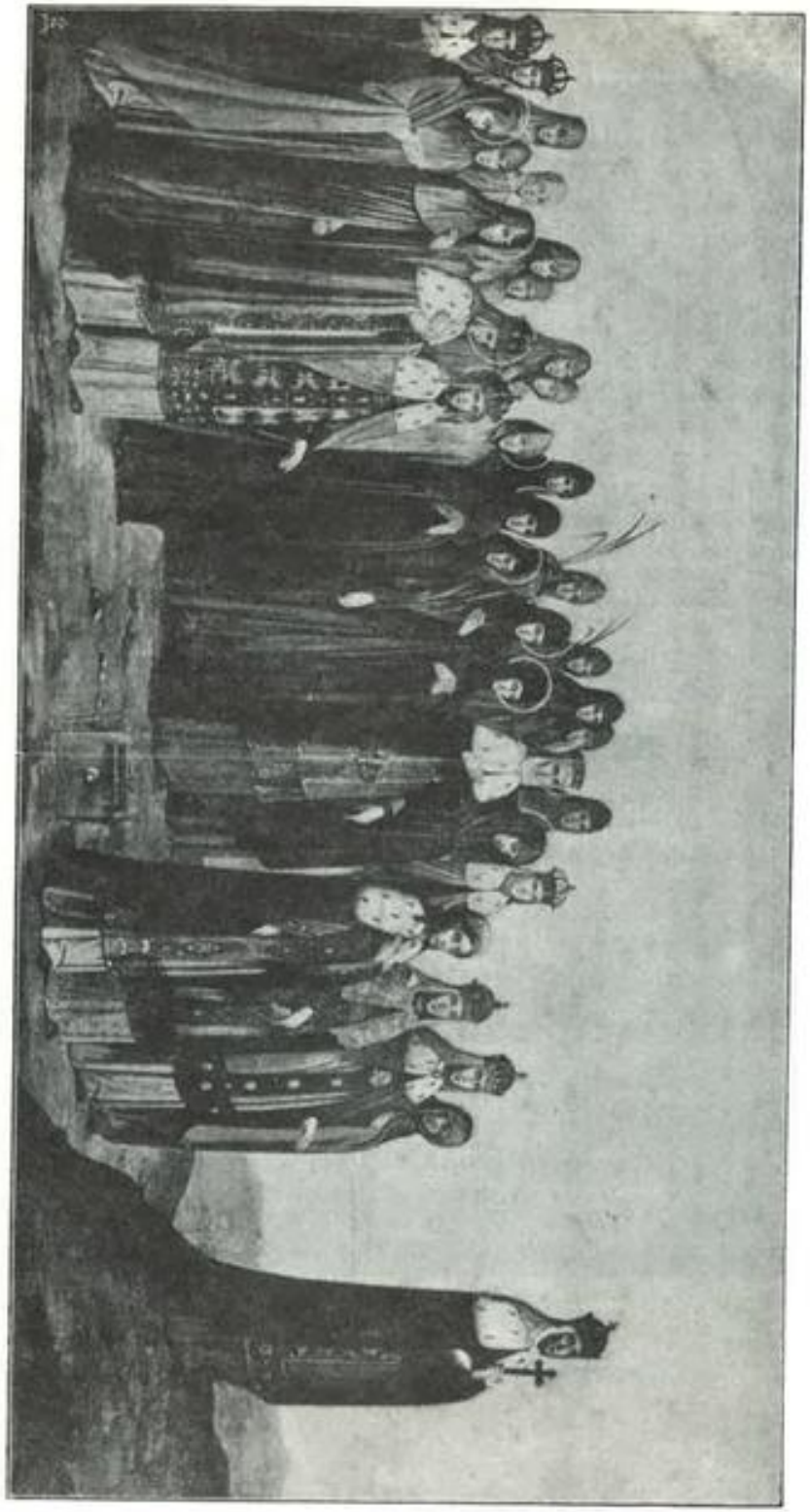
3. The third wave consists mostly of the third-generation descendants of the Jewish revolutionaries who helped Lenin to create the contemporary State Prison known as the USSR. Seeing their parents and grandparents disillusioned and victimized by the very system they had created, they at first became cynical and embittered, robbed of any spiritual values in their lives. They were well acquainted with the utilitarian values and way of life in today's civilization, and saw the rampant revolt against traces of the former Judeo-Christian civilization (through contemporary arts, rock music, soulless architecture and immorality). And from this they turned to Russia's Christian past and discovered the sanctity of ancient asceticism. This generation of Russians has come to Christian Orthodoxy as their reminder of the Old Testament world. They openly protest, go into exile and are imprisoned, filling up the very concentration camps which their grandfathers designed. There is strength in this generation, as is manifested in Zoya Krakhmalnikova and other outspoken Orthodox Christians. Once they emigrate to the free world, they take part in the missionary work of spreading Orthodox ascetic practices.

The strength of the present-day Orthodox movement lies only in the proper understanding of the historic path of acquiring the Holy Spirit – "building sanctity" – and in manifesting the Truth before the twilight of the Apocalyptic Age that is looming over Christian civilization.

The world of saints, Orthodox and in full tradition, is a realm that is close to all humankind. All nations – whether they have, in their historic path, known Christ and his militant and triumphant Church, or whether they are new to Christ's message – are all members of one human race. All of them long for oneness of soul and harmony with God-given nature, all groan for release from the bondage of sickness and death, all long for the paradisiacal life for which man was created. The life of Adam before the Fall is still familiar to all nations, but the path to its restoration has been lost, and appears foggy at best. The aim of the Kontzevitches' life work was to remind people of the way, empirically proven and patristically preserved. This way will help men and women, once they are familiar with its principles, to endure difficult personal and national situations. It is a way out of the dilemmas of our tired earth, sick with sin. Only by following Christ's way does one go on a sure-tested road towards personal sanctity and the common salvation.

We are infinitely thankful to the labor of love of Professor Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch, and we ask our readers to pray for their souls.

Abbot Herman and Brotherhood
Synaxis of the Holy Twelve Apostles



SYNAXIS OF THE WOMEN SAINTS OF HOLY RUSSIA

From Russian Pilgrim, *1895.*

APPENDIX I

WOMEN OF HOLY RUSSIA[1]

Let women keep silence in the churches.
(I Cor. 14:34)

I.

AWAY FROM THE TUMULT and noise of the world, in quiet monastic refuges, in deserted landscapes which evoke thoughts of eternity, women of Holy Russia worked out their salvation for a thousand years, striving to acquire first of all humility of wisdom.

The spiritual fragrance of this key virtue in Patristic Orthodoxy, that of HUMILITY OF WISDOM, which is the joining together of humility and wisdom, has always been very close to true Orthodox women, and especially to the women saints. Behind them there always shines forth the humble image of Her Who is the first Abbess of all monastics, the Most Holy Theotokos.

Particularly is this true of the women saints of Holy Russia, who were so penetrated by this quiet, refined, and pure virtue that only very meager information has even come down to us about them. They strove to be unseen, unnoticed, concealed in quiet monastic cells behind monastery walls, located beyond distant lakes and rivers, in forgotten sketes hidden in green thickets,

1. Abbreviated from the weekly periodical *Russian Pilgrim,* 1893, nos. 41, 42, 43 & 50; with additional information from *Russian Ascetics of the 18th & 19th Centuries,* by Bishop Nikodim of Belgorod, Vols. 1, 2, & 13, Moscow, 1912. Other sources: *Lives of Russian Saints,* 2 Vols. Synodal edition of 1908 and 1916; *History of the Russian Church* by Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow, 1891; *Vologda Patericon,* Vologda, 1880; *Pilgrim's Guide to Imperial Russia* by Pavlovsky, 1907; *Orthodox Monasteries in the Russian Empire* by L. I. Denison, Moscow, 1908; *Lives of Saints* by Archbshop Philaret of Chernigov, St. Petersburg, 1892-1900; *Holy Russia* by Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin, St. Petersburg, 1891; *The Mother of God* by E. Poselianin, St. Petersburg, 1905.

in the shadow of weeping willows and birch groves, which alone heard their quiet prayer and soft chanting and saw them beholding the bridal chamber of their Divine Bridegroom, Christ.

The number of women saints known by the Church on earth falls far short of the number of men saints, and there has come down to us a surprisingly small number of their Lives, many of which are brief and rather general. This does not, however, mean that their numbers were really so few or that they did not attain the spiritual heights of men — but only emphasizes the surpassing beauty of their other-worldly humility and silence (hesychia).

The Orthodox women saints, unlike Martha, sit at the feet of the Lord and pay heed to the words of Christ: *Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her* (Luke 10:42) — and they *keep silence in the churches* (I Cor. 14:34).

II.

THE VERY BEGINNING of Christianity in Russia occurred through a holy woman, **St. Olga, Equal to the Apostles** (†969, July 11), whose grandson, **St. Vladimir** (†1015, July 15) baptized his Kievan princedom in 988 and gave the whole of Russia the Orthodox Christian Faith at the very time when Byzantium had reached its highest point in all phases of spiritual culture. By this time all the basic heresies had been identified and uprooted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and monasticism was in full bloom. Thus Russia from the very beginning was entrusted with the fulness of the *pure Faith, Orthodoxy,* and she treasured it throughout the ages as the supreme heritage in her hierarchy of values, herself thereby becoming, in the activities and hopes of her best sons and daughters, Holy Russia, the guardian of Orthodoxy. Such she has remained until this very day, even while in bonds and in the catacombs under the Communist Yoke.

Monasticism immediately captured the Russian soul and was practiced in Kievan Russia in monasteries and convents built by princes and noblemen. It flourished predominantly in the Kiev Caves, which began with a spark brought to Russia from Mt. Athos by St. Anthony. Monasteries both for men and women began to spring up in various places, being founded chiefly by princes, who saw them as treasuries of sanctity for their principality, but also by hierarchs, by monks, and by righteous women — some even being founded by women for men, as in the case of **St. Euphrosyne of Polotsk**, that great pilgrim-lover of Byzantium and the Holy Land, where she reposed in the Lavra of her beloved St. Theodosius the Coenobiarch, her relics being later translated to the Kiev Caves.

ST. EUPHROSYNE OF POLOTSK (center)
with a synaxis of Byzantine Saints whom she venerated in the Lavra of St. Theodosius the Coenobiarch, Palestine. *On her left:* Sts. Eudotia and Theodotia. *On her right:* St. Maria, the wife of St. Xenophontos, and St. Sophia, the mother of St. Sabbas the Sanctified.

A popular paper icon published by the Fesenko company in 1906, as a blessing of the Monastery of St. Theodosius the Coenobiarch.

The coming of the Tatar barbarians, who demolished Kiev, burning and destroying on their way all the monasteries and killing their inhabitants, did not cut off the growth of monastic communities. On the contrary, the number of communities increased. The astonishing impulse for the foundation of new monasteries, which now moved northward, was as it were an answer to the question of how to retain the Orthodox philosophy of life. In addition to providing a harmonious and economically independent communal life, these monasteries, which formed an Orthodox mentality in the full spirit of the Church, opened up a mystical realm of spiritual perfection which transfigured earthly men, women and children into angel-like beings. This inspired the newly-enlightened Russian people, and a whole network of monastic citadels sprang up around Novgorod, Pskov, Suzdal and, of course, Moscow, which, after the fall of the Second Rome – Constantinople – became the Third Rome. Great saints founded monasteries in their period: **St. Anna of Novgorod** (†1050, Oct. 4); three Pskov Abbesses: **Eupraxia** (†1243, May 8), **Martha** (†1300, Nov. 8) and **Bassa** (†1473, March 19); **St. Charitina, Abbess of Novgorod** (†1281, Oct. 5); **St. Eudocia of Moscow** (†1407, July 7), foundress of two convents; and many others in Moscow, both canonized and uncanonized.

Monastic communities of virgins in Holy Russia were greatly esteemed and honored – and not only as places where princes would put their wives away when they wished to get rid of them. The women's monasteries were always thought of as holy places, havens for ascetic labor, with a life centered about the cycle of beautiful and all-encompassing church services, for which refined liturgical arts were developed. The use of convents as hospitals, orphanages, schools, and workshops was always secondary, when it appeared at all. The ancient Byzantine models of asceticism, which were constantly present through the reading of the Synaxaria, the Prologue, and the Lives of Saints, were the main source of monastic inspiration and it was here that the heart of the women of Holy Russia lay.

It is wrong to say,[2] simply because no striking Lives of such women saints have come down to us, that women in ancient Russia did not follow the severe anchoretic, hesychast practices of the desert-dwellers of old. There is sufficient indication in the sources that remain that there were indeed such heroines, who waged no less fierce battles with the prince of this world than the great holy men whose Lives are well known to us. The Lives of women anchorites in later centuries – such as **Abbess Eupraxia of Old Ladoga** (†1823, Sept. 23) and **Blessed Mary the Cave-digger of the White Mountains** (†1822,

2. As does Fedotov, and also T. Manukhina in *St. Anna of Kashin* (Paris, 1954).

June 22) – show clearly what was in the hearts of women saints in that earlier time when the whole of Russian society marvelled at the anchoretic fervor of the dwellers of the unknown northern wilds.

The monastic movement of the holy women of Russia, to be sure, took forms that were somewhat different from those of the holy men of the North. It was the men who – in the steps of St. Sergius of Radonezh – were fearless "pioneers" of the northern forests, braving the untrodden territories of Russia with their constant dangers from wild animals, roaming Tatars and robbers, and the sheer physical hardships of establishing a monastic settlement in an uninhabited forest. The great desert-dwellers, after founding a monastic community, would usually move northward to find a new solitary desert, followed by their disciples, and often their disciples themselves would leave the original monastery to found their own communities. Women desert-lovers would then settle near the village which had grown up around the monastery, or in the monastery buildings themselves, if they had been deserted by the monks; thus they would have the protection of an established place already carved out of the wilderness and surrounded by a fence or wall. Here the women desert-dwellers would continue the founder's rule and tradition. Often it would be little-known women ascetics who would hand down the only information we have about some saint. Thus, when the relics of **St. Cyril of Velsk** (†15th century, June 9) were discovered incorrupt, it was a certain **Righteous Nun Aquilina Nakapa** (†1517) who gave information about the unknown Saint, having herself received a miraculous healing from him, as had the **Righteous Eulampia**; and so the story of St. Cyril was handed down to us – but nothing more is known of the Blessed Aquilina and her monastic tradition.

Another kind of desert-loving holy woman is to be found in ancient Russia in a place which might easily be overlooked today when Orthodox society has become so worldly and the fundamentals of Orthodox upbringing have been largely forgotten. The primary duty which the Church lays upon woman is not merely the rearing of children, but, more importantly, the *breathing into them* of the sacred fragrance of *humility and meekness of heart*, which seals the spiritual bond between Christ and the child from infancy onward. This is no easy task, and never was. It is to this task that the spiritual energy of desert-loving women went in ancient Russia. Thus it is that many great saints of the Northern Thebaid had great saints for their mothers. The love for the life of paradise in the wilderness, and the spiritual strength that comes from a humble heart capable of enduring the hardships of the desert, were first given to the ascetics of the North during the guilelessness of childhood by their angel-like mothers, who, being unable to go to the northern desert

themselves by reason of their worldly obligations, raised up sons fit to be desert-dwellers.

The mother of St. Sergius of Radonezh was **St. Maria, nun of Khotkov** (†1337); of St. Alexander of Svir, **St. Barbara, nun of Oyat** (†1500); of St. Macarius of Kolyazin, **St. Irene of Kozhin** (†15th century, June 1); of St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow and monk of Solovki, **St. Barsanuphia, schemanun of Moscow**; the mothers of the fools-for-Christ of the North, Sts. Nicholas Kochanov and John of Ustiug, were the **Righteous Juliana** (†1384, Dec. 21) and **Abbess Natalia**; and there were others. The sister of St. Artemius of Verkola was the blessed **Parasceva of Pirimin**, venerated locally as a Saint. The widely-venerated **St. Juliana of Murom** (†1604, Jan. 2), who raised many children and grandchildren, was a desert-dweller at heart.

III.

THE MONASTIC EXODUS into the Northern Thebaid, although it unintentionally resulted in the colonization of the forest wilds, was first of all an enormous movement of individuals who sought solely to acquire Christian perfection and other-worldliness. It was the fruit of a deeply-rooted Orthodox world view, according to which fallen human nature was to be governed by the love of Truth, by means of a definite patristic standard: non-acquisitiveness, the mental activity of the Jesus Prayer, hesychasm. This produced such a flowering of genuine Orthodox sanctity in men and women that even children, caught up in the ascetic fervor, reached the spiritual states of men of mature years and worked miracles after their death. The child-Saints of the North include **St. Artemius of Verkola** (†1545, June 23), **Sts. James** and his brother **John of Munezh** (†1570, June 24), **St. Glyceria** the young girl **of Novgorod** (†1522, May 13), and **St. John of Ustiug** (†1494, May 29), the fool for Christ who died at 18, having already achieved a height of Christian perfection.

Of all the hundreds of new monasteries which were founded each century in the vastness of the Northern Thebaid, at least a fourth were convents, some of them remaining small sketes with just a few virgins, others becoming much larger. Considering all the dangers of the uninhabited, almost impenetrable marshland of intertwining lakes and rivers, and also the sparseness of Orthodox habitation in these vast areas during the 14th to 17th centuries, it is indeed amazing what great fervor and zeal the women of Holy Russia manifested in following the anchoretic path of the ancient Saints of the Thebaid. Who can tell the full story of their spiritual heights? Who can enumerate their struggles, especially today when the very principles of True Orthodoxy are rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth?

The great Saints of the Thebaid, **Anthony** and **Pachomius**, and the great Orthodox Father of the West, **St. Benedict of Nursia**, founded monastic communities for women and placed their sisters in charge of them. So, in Russia, the great **St. Euthymius of Suzdal**, being in close contact with St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Alexius of Moscow, even being called "the second Sergius," founded in 1364 a coenobitic convent, just like St. Pachomius', across the river from his monastery, entrusting its care to his niece. He directed his convent according to a special monastic rule which he had from his elder the cave-dweller of Nizhni-Novgorod, **St. Dionysius** (later Archibshop) **of Suzdal** (†1385, Oct. 15), who was in the full tradition of Byzantine spirituality and twice travelled to Greece.

This same holy monk, St. Dionysius, blessed his spiritual daughter **St. Theodora of Nizhni-Novgorod** (†1375, April 16) to found a coenobitic convent in the latter city, and later tonsured her into it. In her we see the first clear example of a severe female ascetic Saint of the pure Byzantine tradition in the North.

IV.

ONE OF THE GREATEST FATHERS of the Northern Thebaid was **St. Dionysius of Glushetsk** (†1437, June 1). Through him the spirit of Mt. Athos — that is to say, of traditional Byzantine spirituality — went deep into the North and entered the women's convents. Earlier direct contacts with Mt. Athos had been maintained throughout the centuries, beginning with the Kievan St. Anthony, but St. Dionysius is the first one known to us to establish a convent with an Athonite typicon. A native of Vologda, St. Dionysius was tonsured in the Spasso-Kameni Island Monastery by its Abbot, **Blessed Dionysius** (†1425, Oct. 18), who out of special love gave his disciple his own name. Having received hesychast training for many years in this monastery, which had an Athonite typicon, and feeling the need for silence, St. Dionysius went deep into the forest wilds of Vologda and there, near the wild river Glushitsa, began his anchoretic life. Soon he was followed not only by monks, but also by God-thirsting women, for whom he established a convent on a nearby hill and dedicated the community to St. Leontius of Rostov, since he had just returned from Rostov, where he received the blessing and instruction of his elder Dionysius, now Bishop of Rostov. This convent with its Athonite spirit flourished and spread the desert-dwelling ideal for women far and wide.

St. Dionysius was also an outstanding icon-painter, and it is known that he adorned the convent with his icons. One of them, a wonder-working icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, was given to the Monastery of the Seven Hills located on the same river, which had been founded by the

Saint's disciples. When this monastery became deserted after a plague, the Most Holy Mother of God appeared in a dream to a righteous nun in a Moscow convent, **Juliana of the Belozersk family**, who had lain paralyzed for three years, promising her healing if she would go to the Seven Hills Monastery and rebuild the church there. This the Blessed Juliana promised, was miraculously healed, and went north and found the deserted monastery and the wondrous icon painted by St. Dionysius. In the midst of the total desolation, she built herself a tiny cell next to the church and thus refounded the convent, which existed for many centuries and became a seedbed of the spiritual tradition received through St. Dionysius. Later another Saint shone forth there, the **Blessed Nun Mariamna** (†1643).

Other convents became renowned in the Northern Thebaid. In the vicinity of the *St. Cyril of White Lake Monastery*, following the tradition of this Saint, a convent was founded at Goritsy on a river bank by the noblewoman **Eudocia** in 1544; it became a Lavra for women in the North where many holy and renowned women worked out their salvation right up to Soviet times.

In *Vologda*, the **Holy Nun Domnicia** founded in 1560 the famous Dormition Convent, where a stone church was dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh, the Abba of the North.

In the *Kargopol territory*, a Dormition Convent was founded in 1592 by **St. John the Hairy**, who was "a laborer of the monastery of virgins," as the ancient chronicles describe him; he later received the schema with the name of Jonah and was buried in the convent.

In *Solvychegodsk*, the **Holy Virgin Juliana**, refusing to accede to the unclean desire of a pagan, was drowned in the river, where the Ulianovsky convent was soon built, with her as its patron.

In the Arctic territory of *Archangelsk*, a Holy Trinity Convent was founded in 1604. In 1664 the **Righteous Abbess Martha**, who was known personally by Tsar Alexis Michailovich Romanov, turned it into a blossoming monastic citadel for women in the utmost North.

In *Old Ladoga* near Valaam, the renowned Dormition Convent existed from the 15th century. After being destroyed by the Swedes, it was rebuilt in 1617 and became one of northern Russia's most important contemplative centers, where later there shone forth the great **Abbess Eupraxia**, spiritual converser with Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam and St. Alexander of Svir.

V.

SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED WOMEN would never plunge into the wilds absolutely alone, but would always approach the monastic calling with the

sole purpose of saving their soul with caution, self-distrust, and meekness. They would settle by twos and threes in humble abodes, often abandoned cabins, in forlorn areas, near churches on the outskirts of town, or near cemeteries. They would provide themselves with God-pleasing deeds: reading the Psalter over the dead, baking prosphora, painting icons, making candles, or mending; they would remain in silence while one sister would read soul-profiting texts from the Lives of Saints or the Holy Fathers, or they would chant canons, akathists, or "psalms" (religious songs), shedding tears of contrition and repentance. Their common sharing of the basic necessities of life would give them spiritual growth and strength, providing an active experience in sobriety of life, something especially essential for those who might be called by God for a life of seclusion after years of trials and sufferings.

Their cells would consist of a one-room cabin with anterooms. It would have an iconostasis or icon-corner, before which vigil lamps would be burning at all times, and an analogion with all the books necessary for the indispensable reading of the daily cycle of services. There would be the smell of incense and home-made bread, a hooked runner rug, flowerpots on the wide window sills, neatness, and a reigning quietness — all this would add to the warmth of a typical cell of the "God-workers." Here the all-night vigils would frequently be conducted, and a devout, God-fearing eldress would console suffering hearts with words of contrition, softer than oil.

The whole touching atmosphere of these "workers for God" spoke of deep warmth, simplicity, and inward tranquility and peace with God and His transfigured world. This was the most popular and beloved way in which living Orthodox piety was disseminated among the people throughout Russia. This way of life has withstood all historical temptations. The "babushkas" of today, who have saved Orthodox piety from the Communists, still get their leaven from the heart of Holy Russia.

VI.

ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

ST. DOROTHY was born in 1549, in the prosperous early part of the reign of John IV (the Terrible), and died in 1629 during the peaceful reign of the first Romanov Tsar, Michael Theodorovich; but her whole life, beginning when she was twelve years old, passed in the midst of the most frightful conditions of rebellion, anarchy, famine, plague, and foreign invasion.

This holy nun of the latter times was of noble blood, and some say that she was of the family of the Princes Korkodinov, but neither her place of birth nor her name before receiving the monastic tonsure are known to us.

She was given in marriage to Theodore Ladygin and by him had a son, Michael; they lived in the region north of Moscow, where the city of Kashin is located. In the first decade of the 17th century, Kashin was laid waste by invading Poles and Lithuanians, and St. Dorothy's husband fell on the field of battle in defence of the city.

Thus it was that, having lost her husband and her earthly happiness in the midst of the terrible misfortunes of the Russian Land, St. Dorothy, already a woman of mature years, resolved to abandon the world and seek, in prayers and struggles, not a temporary happiness which is so often darkened by various evils, but rather a heavenly and eternal blessedness. By Divine inspiration she chose for herself a peaceful and soul-saving refuge in the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord in Kashin. This monastery, renowned for treasuring the holy relics of **St. Anna of Kashin**, the Princess Schema-nun and miracle-worker (†1368, Oct. 2 and June 12), had just been laid waste together with the city, and how many labors and deprivations and struggles stood before her when she entered it! With great effort she made for herself a humble, confining cell in the midst of the ruins, and here she devoted herself to prayer, fasting, obedience, and other holy struggles known to God alone. Here amidst the ashes she found a large Icon of the Korsun Mother of God, which she kept in her cell, and which later became celebrated for working many miracles.

The whole territory where this peaceful hamlet once lay presented itself as a virtual wilderness of dark forests, endless birch-groves and desolate lakes and ponds abundant with birds and freely-roaming wild animals. This was also the native country of highly-esteemed desert-dwelling saints whom St. Dorothy could not but hold very dear to her heart; for she did not retreat, to console her old age, to one of the well-established convents which abounded at that time in Moscow, but chose the silence of the Kashin wilds, for which she had been preparing her whole life long. Just eight miles from Kashin had lived **St. Macarius of Kolyazin** (†1483), who had the custom to roam the woods like a new Adam amidst wild beasts who walked with him like sheep. His nephew, **St. Paisius of Uglich** (1504), joined him as a boy and reached such heights that the Most Holy Mother of God visited him when he was at prayer with his disciple St. Adrian and **St. Cassian** (1504), the friend of St. Nilus of Sora. Not far away also was Soliger Lake with **St. Nilus** (1554) living in it on **Stolbensk** islet. Another native of Kashin, **St. Sabbas of Vishera** (1460), having returned from Mt. Athos, became a stylite. All these angel-like men founded monasteries, and the fragrance of their life spread far and wide and inspired ascetic exploits. All this constituted St. Dorothy's spiritual inheritance in her melancholy abode and raised her mind to higher visions and thoughts divine.

ST. DOROTHY OF KASHIN

A fresco in the St. Xenia Skete, Wildwood, California.

At the same time she strove to help all the many inhabitants of the city and the surrounding area, who lived in great affliction and misfortune. By her word of consolation, by her heartfelt kindness, and by gifts of money, she strove to help everyone and encourage and raise up all those who suffered in this most oppressive time. All the possessions remaining to her after the death of her husband she either spent for the restoration of the convent or distributed to the poor. For herself she kept nothing except prayer, tears, and struggles. Having been accustomed to live amidst wealth and abundance, now she did not even know where to find her daily bread, and she had to endure every kind of deprivation and need. But with God's help she endured everything with greatness of soul and with firm faith in Divine Providence. In her small, one-windowed cell she had a place hidden from the eyes of men, where she wept, prayed, and sighed before the Lord God day and night over her own salvation and that of her fellow men. Especially did she pray for her husband, for the suffering city, and the holy convent. She sought one thing: the most difficult and sorrowful struggles, in order to cleanse her soul of sins and prepare herself for blessed eternity.

The Lord heard the fervent prayer of St. Dorothy for the restoration of the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord. Soon after she had settled in the ruins, they began to resound with the spiritual rejoicing of the sisters, who little by little returned to the convent when the danger had passed. The rumor of the exalted spiritual life of St. Dorothy and her deeds of mercy attracted to the convent also many other virgins and women who were seeking the salvation of their souls. Thus the monastery was re-established, and when enough sisters had gathered together, an abbess was needed for them. But St. Dorothy, who by her numberless labors and struggles and gifts had been responsible for the restoration of the monastery, hated all glory and outward honors, and in her great humility she decisively refused the high position of abbess, preferring to continue her ascetic life in the calling of a simple nun. Thus, for the rest of her life the Saint served for all as an example of love of labor, patience, self-sacrifice, and flaming love for and trust in God. Her whole life exhaled the fragrance of the great women-strugglers of Christian antiquity, and likewise of those who preceded her in her native land: St. Anna of Kashin, **St. Euphrosyne,** the great foundress of convents and monasteries in **Polotsk** (†1173, May 23). **St. Febronia of Murom** (†1228, June 25), **St. Euphrosyne** (†1250, Sept. 25), the great virgin-ascetic of **Suzdal,** daughter of St. Michael of Chernigov, and others.

Such a life did this holy woman live almost in our own days. For it is not the times that are at fault if we do not see now the abundance of holy

men and women who flourished in earlier centuries; it is rather our evil will, and lack of determination, and want of faith. But *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8).

In the year 1615 St. Dorothy received the Great Angelic Schema and redoubled her labors of ascetism and piety. Finally, after twenty years of struggles in the Convent of the Meeting of the Lord, the holy Dorothy came to the end of her much-suffering life, in the eightieth year of her age. On the eve of the feast of the great and holy inspirer of monastic struggles in the Russian North, St. Sergius of Radonezh, on September 24, 1629, St. Dorothy peacefully reposed in the Lord. From that day she has stood before the Lord with the burning lamp of flaming love for God, and with the oil of good deeds done for her neighbor and of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit which she acquired by her holy life. She passed over from death unto the life prepared for all who love God, from an earthly into a heavenly habitation, where she has yet greater boldness of intercession before the Almighty.

The holy remains of St. Dorothy were buried near the main convent church of the Meeting of the Lord, on the north side. Over the grave a memorial of white stone was erected with pillars carved out of it, and the inscription on this memorial survived in almost perfect condition until the 20th century.

St. Dorothy remained in spirit with her monastery even after her repose. Her memory was kept sacredly by the sisters down to our own times. Many have been the miracles of healing and supernatural help worked at her grave for those who have come with faith in her intercession before God. A list of these miracles was kept in the monastery. But her memory became especially revered over two centuries after her repose because of her appearances to Abbess Antonia of the Saint's convent.

VII.

ABBESS ANTONIA MEZENTSOVA (†1875, Jan. 26) was truly a saint. A spiritual daughter of the great 19th-century saint, **Priest Peter of Uglich,** she was so penetrated with true Orthodox monastic spirit that St. Anna of Kashin would appear to her and tell who of the sisters ought to be tonsured into the great schema and even where the ancient schemas were to be found.

Abbess Antonia had been a sister at a convent in Suzdal and had agreed, at the persuasion of her godmother, to transfer to the Kashin Convent of the Meeting. But the 20-year-old novice grieved greatly at leaving her first monastery, where the relics of the pious Princess Sofia (wife of John IV) reposed, supposing that she would be deprived of the grace which she had known there, for **St. Sophia-Solomonia of Suzdal** (†1542, Dec. 16) worked many great miracles

in her Protection Convent, which was founded and spiritually directed by the great **St. Euthymius of Suzdal**, friend of St. Sergius of Radonezh.

But then, after tearful prayer at night, she saw in a dream that she was entering the Convent of the Meeting in Kashin, which she had not seen before; but by reason of the great crowds of people she could not enter the monastery. After many efforts she finally entered, and being astonished at the great numbers of pilgrims, she asked the reason for this; she was told that the relics of St. Dorothy (of whom she had never heard) were being opened for her canonization. This vision cut short the grief of the future Abbess Antonia and gave her the assurance that there was a righteous one reposing in the Convent of the Meeting also, and that her transferal there in 1839 was not without the will of God.

After some years in the Convent, the novice Alexandra (as she was then called) entered a particularly difficult period of spiritual trials. One day in this period, when she had not slept for several nights out of sorrow, she went to the monastery church for Matins, and after sitting down for the reading of the kathismata, she fell in to a light sleep. Suddenly an unknown Schema-nun stood before her after coming out of the northern door of the Altar. She held in her right hand a wooden cross and a lighted wax candle, and in her left hand a smoking censer. Her mantle was gathered up and hung over her left arm. She stood right in front of novice Alexandra and directed a penetrating glance at her, as if seeing through her inward grief. Immediately the novice arose, but the vision had already vanished, and no one around her had seen it; and in her heart she felt an indescribably joyful feeling, as if she had never been in a sorrowful state. When she returned to her cell after Matins, she hastened to sketch with a pencil on paper the Schema-nun she had seen, whom she recognized as St. Dorothy, whom she deeply revered and often called upon in prayer. Several years after this she painted the Icon of St. Dorothy in full stature, exactly as she had sketched it that morning under the impression of that wonderful vision.

Later Mother Antonia became Abbess in the Convent of St. Dorothy, and out of her reverence for the Saint she desired to show some special veneration for her memory. Many times, when visiting her holy Elder, Father Peter the fool for Christ's sake of Uglich, she would hear from him these words of reproach: "Dorothy is not honored among you!" This greatly grieved Mother Antonia, and finally she asked the Elder what she should do to venerate the holy one. He replied sharply and decisively: "Build a chapel!" In obedience to her holy Elder, she had a small chapel erected out of sheets of metal in a single morning in the summer of 1857, fearing that someone might tell the local bishop and he might forbid the construction if it were long underway.

BLESSED SCHEMA-ABBESS MARTHA
Born Maria Petrovna Protasieva
†April 30, 1813

A disciple of Sts. Theodore of Sanaxar and Paisius Velichkovsky.

A portrait based on her likeness while alive, but presented here with a scroll as a preparation for her possible canonization due to her incorrupt relics, which were uncovered several years after her death.

The bishop, however, when he found out about it, approved this veneration of St. Dorothy, and in 1870 Abbess Antonia was able to build a larger, stone chapel over the Saint's relics.

During these years St. Dorothy appeared many times and worked many miracles in her convent. A certain nun, Mother Seraphima, loved to spend the midnight hours with her cell attendant in the convent church. One night they came to the church at midnight and to their amazement saw a strange nun praying by a window, even though the church had been locked and no one could have entered. Another time at midnight they saw in the church an extraordinary light, all the candles were burning, and a nun was praying before the Altar. Many other sisters also were vouchsafed such visions of St. Dorothy.

We do not know the fate of the Convent or of the veneration of St. Dorothy after the Communist Revolution. But among those who love God's saints she will not be forgotten, and in heaven she continues to pray for the newly-devastated Russian land and for all who venerate her with faith and love.

VIII.

"DO NOT OPEN your heart to another without need; out of a thousand you may find only one who would keep your secret. Strive by every means to keep the treasure of your spiritual gifts. Otherwise you will lose it and not find it again." Such was the counsel of St. Seraphim of Sarov to his "orphans," based on the patristic teaching to gather spiritual treasure in silence. And precisely such was the spiritual fervor of holy women in Russia: concealed humility, the hiding from the human eye. This is so evident from the great Lives which *have* come down to us: for example, **Maria of Olonets**; the virgins of St. Seraphim: **Anastasia Logachev** (†1815); **Neonilla** (†1875); **Pelagia** (†1884); **"Pasha" of Sarov** (†1915); and, especially inspiring, as revealed in her own autobiography, **Abbess Thaisia of Leushino** (†1915), who with the help of St. John of Kronstadt revived the great monastery of St. Therapontes of White Lake, whose Abbess, Seraphima, met a martyr's death at the hands of the Communists.

One of such silent ones, literally hidden from the world, a contemporary of **St. Dorothy of Kashin**, who blossomed in the uttermost North of the Russian Thebaid, was the Righteous **Parasceva of Pinega**.

PARASCEVA OF PINEGA

"THE PINEGA is a dreamy river, not broad like the Dvina, of which it is a tributary, but like a placid pond, and its many reeds and lilies are still

ABBESS THAISIA OF LEUSHINO
A spiritual daughter of St. John of Kronstadt.

and unmoved upon the surface of the stream. The river is so narrow, one could often throw a stone across it, and on each bank is forest, forest, and again forest, forest without end. This is the land of tundra, the most dangerous region in Europe," as it was described by Stephen Graham at the turn of this century in his travel journal of the Russian North, *Undiscovered Russia.*

In this land, in the village of Verkola near Kevrola, a boy Artemius was born in 1532 to pious parents Cosmas and Apollinaria. He was God-fearing and unusually meek and holy. At the age of twelve, when ploughing with his father in the field, he was struck dead by thunder, which the simple villagers took as a sign that God was angry with him, and they left him unburied in the forest. One can well imagine how the village opinion affected his already God-fearing and extremely pious family. In this atmosphere of awe and silent trembling before God grew up St. Artemius' sister, Parasceva, who matured into sanctity without knowing it. Shunned by the world, but surrounded by God's beauty of the flowering northern spring and preserved by the snow-swept winter, she herself became a saint and a wonderworker, for, like her brother, she was a chosen vessel of God. When after 32 years the body of her holy brother was discovered incorrupt, and he worked many miracles and was esteemed by all, so that even a whole monastery was established over his relics, Parasceva was already formed spiritually, and to avoid the pitfalls of pride, she withdrew to silence and oblivion. Thus we do not even know whether she entered a convent or when she died. We only know that she died a righteous virgin.[3]

In 1610 the relics of St. Artemius were examined by Metropolitan Macarius of Novgorod, his Life was written and a Service was composed to him. The same year a coffin with the fragrant relics of a virgin was discovered in the Pirimin church of St. George, and a certain man was granted a vision: a fair virgin appeared to him, informing that her name was Parasceva, that sick people should come to this church and pray to St. George and the newly-revealed Wonderworker Parasceva, and that help would be granted, which indeed began to happen abundantly. Later a special chapel was built to treasure her relics, an old icon of her was placed there, and her memory was celebrated on October 28. Such is the power of sanctity hidden in God.

IX.

THE ASCETIC EXPLOIT of foolishness-for-Christ, so dominant in Russian sanctity, was especially favored by women of Holy Russia. The 18th

3. On her see the monthly *Strannik*, 1878, no. 12; for the Life of St. Artemius (in English) see *The Orthodox Word*, March-April, 1974.

ST. XENIA OF PETERSBURG

An icon from the St. Xenia Skete, Wildwood, California.

century saw a number of remarkable women ascetics who undertook this *podvig*. Perhaps the most outstanding of them was **St. Xenia of Petersburg,**[4] a wonder-worker both before and after her repose, whose miraculous intercession for people has only increased during the Soviet era. The 19th century also produced women fools-for-Christ, such as **Pilgrim Parasceva,** who "discovered" St. John of Kronstadt; **Elizabeth the Wanderer; Helen of Arzamas** (†1820); and the **Sarov-Diveyevo Blessed Ones,** who lived into Soviet times.

X.

THE 20TH CENTURY presented a challenge to righteous women of Russia, who emerged victorious through their fidelity to the faith. Like myrrh-bearing women, they rose in selfless service to persecuted clergy and lay-people.

The Soviet State has tried to eradicate, at least externally, the phenomenon of nuns, while monks have been allowed to openly exist only because they can be used to fill clerical positions. In Russia today, people on the streets do not see women monastics in black dress, who are confined behind the walls of the few remaining convents, regarded by the State as having no "practical" function. But the Brides of Christ, although divested of the external signs of humility and repentance — the black dress —, have only increased their spiritual activity. It is safe to say that the present-day revival of Orthodoxy in Russia is primarily the result of hidden women ascetics who, as soldiers waging unseen warfare, have borne the bloodless martyric crown.

Finally, among the New Martyrs of 20th-century Russia there is a whole host of heroic women, most of them known only to the Lord for Whom they laid down their lives. Those whose memory has been preserved include: **Grand Duchess-Abbess Elizabeth Romanov** (†1918); **Abbesses Sophia** (†1941), **Antonina** (†1929), and **Valentina; Righteous Eldresses Agatha** (†1939) and **Annushka**; and **Virgin Martyrs Lydia** (†1928), **Eudocia,** and the **Shamordino Nuns** (†1930).[5]

Before the approaching darkness of the universal religion of antichrist, the humble service of Orthodox women ascetics — devoid of visible and worldly recognition — shines with virginal, unearthly beauty. The Brides of Christ lead the procession to the Heavenly Kingdom.

Monk Herman

4. Commemorated January 24.
5. See I. M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints* (in English; Platina, California, 1982).

NEW MARTYR NUN ELIZABETH ROMANOV
who restored the office of deaconesses, as well as Orthodox service brotherhoods leading the common life.

IVAN AND HELEN KONTZEVITCH
in 1935, at the time that their literary collaboration commenced.

APPENDIX II

About the Author:

IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH AND HIS WIFE HELEN

1. HIS EARLY LIFE AND SEARCHING

IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH was born in 1893, the oldest of five children. His father, Michael Ivanovich, graduated from the Department of Natural Sciences in Warsaw University and remained at the University. He married and became the father of a family. Desiring to obtain better material conditions, he entered the Ministry of Finances and was transferred to the Baltic region as a tax inspector. Here he advanced to the highest ranks. His was a richly gifted nature.

In 1905, during a meeting in his office, he was standing and reading a report, being brightly illuminated by a lamp, when from the window opposite, overgrown by a grapevine, a shot rang out: someone had aimed at his head, but missed him by a hair.

His wife, Alexandra Ivanovna Liesenevskaya (in monasticism Mother Nectaria), was a Carpatho-Russian, the daughter of a judge, from a family known for its love of Russia. She graduated from secondary school in Warsaw and was married at a very young age. She was a born teacher and knew how to bring up children without punishments (unless a deliberately evil will should be revealed), making every question clear to them. Thus she was able from childhood to explain to her sons the harm of smoking, and they never smoked. Her talent and ability to teach was transmitted to her eldest son.

Ivan spent the early part of his childhood in Latvia. He loved to recall the enchanting impression left on him by the sea, the murmur of the pine forest, the sandy beach. . . . His father was homesick for his native place, Poltava, and at a convenient opportunity he transferred to Mirgorod (a small town near Poltava). There was no suitable educational institution there, and the parents placed their eldest son in the Poltava Imperial Gymnasia, for which Alexandra Ivanovna prepared him splendidly. From that time on Ivan lived no more at home, coming home only on vacations.

He was a boy full of life, gifted with a rich imagination. During the Russo-Japenese War he modelled in clay a miniature of the Russian fleet, and he wrote tales for his brother, illustrating the text with drawings. When his father was transferred to Kremenchug, the boat ride and the voyage on the Dnieper took up all the leisure moments of his sons. They were at home in the watery element, becoming fearless navigators. Ivan, at the time of the flood in Kremenchug, transported people in a rowboat from the flooded portions of the city. Not long before the beginning of the war in 1914, he graduated from the Gymnasia in Poltava and entered the Mathematics Department of the University of Kiev.

In the period before the First World War the Russian intelligentsia was far from the Church, and Ivan was no exception. He turned to searching, supposing that in man there are hidden powers which demand development. He began to study yoga. This did not last long.

The First World War broke out. At the same time there occurred an event that shook to the foundations the life of his family and led Ivan away for good from his ruinous errors. This event was the death of his brother, with whom he was bound by an extremely close and inseparable friendship. Vladimir was two years younger than he, but he surpassed Ivan both in his build and appearance and in his brilliant talents — he learned without any effort. He had an ideal personality, and there was no one who did not love him. He enlisted in the army. In the Carpathian Mountains, where his company was located, there was an enemy attack. It was necessary, in plain sight of the enemy companies, to cut the communications line. Lots were drawn to determine who would go to certain death. The lot did not fall to Vladimir, but, despite the officer's entreaty, he replaced one of the draftees and was killed. This occurred in Austria near Bochna on November 13.

The family's grief was indescribable. Alexandra Ivanovna turned to stone. In order to contact Vladimir, it came into their minds to appeal to a certain Bykov, the former occultist and publisher of the periodical *The Spiritist.* But Bykov replied that he had renounced his former views and had now published a

IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH AS A SOLDIER
at the time he met Archbishop Theophan of Poltava
and Monk Innocent of Optina.

book on Orthodox monasteries called *Quiet Havens for the Consolation of the Storm-tossed Soul.* Among others, there was an account in this book of Optina Monastery. Reading this, Ivan was fired with the desire to go there.

2. OPTINA

It was summer vacation, 1916. Due to the War, there were no more shoes in the stores; throwing off a characteristic feature of his life – to be always decently and neatly dressed – he set out in bark shoes. At the monastery they were about to take him for a Tolstoyite, but when the monks got to know him better they came to love him. As for Ivan, from the first day of his acquaintance with Optina to his very last breath, he lived by it and was faithful to it and what it stood for. He died on the eve of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, to whom was dedicated the main church of the Optina Skete of the Forerunner.

"The Monastery and the Elders," he wrote in his biography of the last Optina Elder, his spiritual father Nectarius, "produced on me an unexpected, irresistible impression, which is impossible to communicate in words; it can only be understood by experiencing it.

"Here one could clearly sense the grace of God, the sanctity of the place, the presence of God. This evoked a feeling of reverence and of responsibility for one's every thought, word, and action, a fear to fall into error, into deception, into self-trust and self-reliance.

"Such a state might be called 'walking before God.'

"Here for the first time the spiritual world was opened up to me, and as the antithesis to it I was shown the 'depths of satan.'

"Here I was spiritually reborn."

And immediately a wondrous world opened itself to the young God-seeker. At that time in Optina the Elders were Fr. Theodosius the Skete Superior, Fr. Anatole (Potapov), and Fr. Nectarius. Fr. Barsanuphius was no longer there. Ivan went every day to the Skete to the Elders. In their cells he often heard the instructions which the Elders gave to those present. Thus once he was in the Skete with a group of young artists, among whom was the celebrated painter Bruni. Elder Theodosius gave him a whole speech on the meaning of art, and at the same time heaped censure on decadence and modernism. Elder Theodosius had the gift and ability of influencing educated young people.

His daily visits to the Skete were always instructive for Ivan Michailovich. But the Elders, occupied with the visitors who came to them with all kinds of sorrows and dramas of the soul, did not give any special time to the young newcomer. They gave him "for education" to Father Joseph, a man experienced

ELDER AMBROSE OF OPTINA
not long before his death.
A photograph that I. M. Kontzevitch obtained while in Optina.

FATHER NICHOLAS ZAGOROVSKY

An enlargement of a tiny photograph that I. M. Kontzevitch carried in his wallet for most of his life.

in spiritual life who had lived in Optina for decades. In the world he had been a bank director and a man of broad education. For the course of the two months he spent at Optina, often, after the church services, Ivan would be invited by Fr. Joseph to his cell. In conversation with him the spiritual world was opened up to the young student.

From Fr. Joseph, Ivan heard an incident from the life of Elder Ambrose which has not yet appeared in print. Once Elder Ambrose, bent over and leaning on a cane, was walking on the path to Optina Monastery. Suddenly he saw before him a loaded wagon with a dead horse lying next to it and on it a peasant, weeping. The loss of a horse, one's means of livelihood, in the peasant way of life is a real catastrophe. Approaching the fallen horse, the Elder went around it slowly three times. Then, taking a switch, he lashed it, crying out to it: "Get up, lazybones!" And the horse obediently got on its feet.

Ivan wrote his mother that she should come to Optina, and she came there with the other children. After the church services they would spend time in the forest reading spiritual books. Thus the summer passed. The next year Ivan could spend only two weeks in Optina, but the spiritual bond with it remained forever. During the civil war Alexandra Ivanovna was unable to visit the monastery. When she came to Optina in 1922, both Elders, Frs. Anatole and Nectarius, and especially the latter, assured her that her eldest son was alive. Fr. Nectarius told her directly: "He is alive, pray for him as among the living; you will hear about him. Up to now it has not been necessary to know about him – submit to necessity." On returning home she received a letter from her son. After this she continued going to the monastery until it ceased to exist, and then to Elder Nectarius at the place of his banishment, until his very death. Through her, her son in the emigration enjoyed the guidance of the Elder for a number of years, and through him several who desired it had contact with the Elder. The letters of his mother served as material for Ivan's compilation of the life of Schema-hieromonk Nectarius.

3. FATHER SERAPHIM ZAGOROVSKY

Kiev University, which Ivan had entered, was evacuated to the Volga region, and he preferred to transfer to Kharkov University. Thanks to a colleague, he was able to rent a room in the house of Fr. Nicholas Zagorovsky (in monasticism, Hieromonk Seraphim).[1] This priest was especially revered in the city as an ascetic, a man of prayer, and a remarkable preacher. Ivan constantly

1. For his Life (in English), see *The Orthodox Word*, 1972, no. 45.

served in the altar for Fr. Nicholas and became known to many residents of Kharkov as a student who was close to the Church. This latter fact twice was of great benefit to Ivan.

As a member of the White Army, Ivan was sent on an assignment to Kharkov. Several days remained free, and he wished, perhaps for the last time in his life (as indeed it was) to see his whole family together. His sister was studying in Kharkov. When they came to the train depot, the line at the ticket window was unbelievably long. A guard came up: "Didn't you serve in the altar for Fr. Nicholas?" "Yes, I did." The guard brought two tickets from the window. Thus Ivan saw his whole family together for the last time, said farewell to his parents, and received their blessing.

The second time was in Gallipoli. Ivan had left the hospital after two sieges of typhus. He was given two containers of sardines "for regaining his health"; that was all. He experienced an unbearable hunger and a terrible despondency, feeling that he would not survive and would die of exhaustion. In this tortuous state he was sitting once at the seashore. Past him walked a valiant soldier from the personal bodyguard of General Kutepov; his chest was covered with crosses and medals. "Didn't you serve in the altar for Father Nicholas?" "Yes, I did." "Come to me, let's remember the old times." It turned out that the son of this non-commissioned officer needed mathematics lessons. As payment for teaching, Ivan was given meals. The boy began soon to study well, and the teacher to get better.

Ivan left the fourth year of the Mathematics Department to join the White Army (to fight against the Communists). In the war he was saved twice from seemingly inevitable death. Once he was sitting at an observation point. The Communist cavalry of Budenny was heading straight for him. Unexpectedly and inexplicably the cavalry turned off to the side. Another time, when he was travelling on a munitions train, mines were placed in the tracks, and the train began to explode. Instead of jumping out immediately, Ivan began to throw things out, until he himself was thrown out by the force of the explosion. He lay unconscious, badly bruised but no more than that.

During the civil war, being on leave, Ivan went to a monastery near Chersonese, where at that time lived Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, for whom he had great veneration. He was placed in a cell with Father Innocent, an Optina monk (who died in Brazil with the rank of Abbot), who taught him to carve wooden spoons such as were made in Optina. Dealing in these "Optina" spoons in the marketplaces of the Ukraine during his trip on the munitions train, Ivan earned his food by this means. He managed to escape the Crimea, beyond all expectations, on almost the last boat to leave.

In Gallipoli Ivan graduated from the Nicholas-Alexis Military Engineering School. All his grades were "A." Here he had the post of elder subensign, successfully combining his natural sensitivity with the demands of military discipline. After his promotion to officer he ended up in Bulgaria, where he was digging tunnels. Having gathered together a little money, he went to study in France. In Bulgaria the wage for a whole day's work was equal to the cost of a single pound of sugar.

4. FRANCE: HIS GUIDANCE BY ELDER NECTARIUS

In Paris he found work as an unloader at the merchandise station at Bourges. At this time (it was the period of the "New Economic Plan" in the Soviet Union) began his active correspondence with his mother. She was going constantly to Elder Nectarius, who from this time on began to guide every step of her son in the emigration. Here is an example:

At the unloading station at Bourges Ivan earned a promotion in his job, which for him then was a great achievement. Suddenly the Elder ordered him immediately to quit the job, or else "there will be a fine and an arrest." Ivan, despite the difficulty of it, obeyed without a word. He was left without a salary or an apartment. This was the time when the Church was not yet divided into jurisdictions (before 1926).

Ivan was enthusiastically attracted by the idea of obtaining for the Church the little hill on the Rue de Crimee where soon the Theological Institute was established. In his spare time he went about collecting contributions for this. Looking over the building (once it had gotten underway), he discovered and came to love a place in the attic of one of the houses. It was a convenient spot for making living quarters. Ivan made a plan of the attic and sent it to Elder Nectarius, asking his blessing to settle there. The blessing was received. He went to Metropolitan Eulogius for permission, but was sent by him to the priest of the St. Sergius church. The latter laughed and said sarcastically: "Perhaps you would like me to settle you in my living room?" It was bitter and hurting that the Elder's blessing turned out to have no effect.

Meanwhile it happened that Ivan was walking with a friend, and in the heat of conversation they did not notice that they had gone too far. On the way they encountered an Orthodox bishop coming up from the subway. "This is Bishop Benjamin Fedchenko, the Inspector of the Academy," said his companion and left. Ivan went up for a blessing and accompanied the Bishop, who was also the Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate. They talked for about an hour. The Bishop asked: "Do you have any news from Russia?" Ivan had in

his pocket the letter in which the Elder had blessed him to live in the attic. Soon Ivan received from the Bishop the desired invitation; he wrote that the students had accepted him into their own family. The room in the attic was built with his money and by his own labor, and he lived in it for a long time while he was studying at the Sorbonne in the Department of Physics and Mathematics.

The Elder absolutely insisted that Ivan should go to school without fail, and he said that the time of study would be accounted to him as prayer. He even allowed him, in case of necessity, to be absent from the Divine Services, except for the twelve major feasts. At the same time he was strictly forbidden by the Elder to have any thoughts of accepting the monastic tonsure, quite unlike the case of his mother, whom the Elder ordered to prepare herself for the tonsure, and also of his younger brother, who later became a bishop (Bishop Nektary of Seattle). However, the life of Ivan Michailovich proceeded just as in the strictest monastic cell.

Eight years passed in finishing the Sorbonne and the Ecole Superieure d'Electricite. Being a very talented physicist, he prepared his colleagues and explained to them how to conduct experiments. They, having scholarships or independent means, were able to finish the course before him.

The Elder entered into all details of Ivan's life. Thus, he blessed him to choose as his confessor Fr. George Spasski. He also forbade him to receive women in his room. Even his colleague in both educational institutions, the modest Catherine Vyacheslavova, he received in the street when she came to ask help in studying. Living in Paris, he attended neither theaters nor concerts nor other entertainments. Once he took a job in an opera as a silent performer, playing an ancient Russian soldier; but despite the fact that, as a student, he was quite in need of the money, he felt the reproach of his conscience and refused to do it again.

The severe, ascetic conditions of his life were not in the least reflected in his bright character. He had an inborn subtle humor — not for nothing was his homeland the heart of Poltava, where the heroes of Gogol lived! Good-hearted, sharp-witted, and entirely harmless humor was a part of him; but he had not the slightest trace of sarcasm. At the same time, he had to the marrow of his bones an artistic temperament; he felt and understood the harmony of colors. He revealed this nearer to his old age, when he blossomed in soul, or rather, matured completely, and his whole life, filled with continence, began to bear fruit.

The serious scientific education which he completed brought him no material success whatever in life. It only gave him a broad mental development

ARCHBISHOP THEOPHAN OF POLTAVA
when he was an archimandrite.

and tempered his character. This evidently was precisely what the Elder intended for him.

When finally he had his diplomas, there began in France a period of a surplus of engineers. He found work in bringing electricity to the obscure, primitive towns of France. Composing projects and plans, often wandering in the mountains, he had not the least comfort. Only during the Second World War did this work come to an end.

5. HIS WIFE HELEN

In 1935, at the home of an iconographer named Orlova, Ivan Michailovich met his future wife, Helen Kartsova. The time of their meeting, which happened to be Ivan Michailovich's nameday, was providential. Only the night before Helen had been preparing to enter a convent, but had been prevented by what must have been an allergy attack.

Ivan Michailovich and Helen quickly discovered that they had a mutual love for Optina and all that it represented. They found in each other the world they had lost and missed all these years. Ivan Michailovich was not only intrigued by Helen's spiritual background, but was especially drawn to her strong personality, so reminiscent of the traditional patristic intelligentsia.

Helen was born on April 13, 1893. Her mother died when she was only eight years old, and she was raised by her aunt, Helen Ozerova, Lady-in-Waiting to the Russian Royal Family. This aunt, like the Royal Family itself, was under the spiritual direction of Archbishop Theophan of Poltava (then Archimandrite), and thus it was that Helen was in contact from early childhood with this holy ascetic, confessor and theologian. When Helen was in her teens, her aunt married the famous S. Nilus, who discovered and deciphered Motovilov's manuscript detailing his famous conversation with St. Seraphim of Sarov on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. S. Nilus spent years in the territory of Optina Monastery, in the house where at one time the philosopher Constantine Leontiev had lived. (Leontiev, incidentally, had been the close friend of Helen's father, to whom he had dedicated his renowned philosophic expositions – "Letters to Young Yuri.") Nilus and his wife were the spiritual children of Elder Barsanuphius of Optina, under whose spiritual guidance Nilus compiled his famous books taken from manuscripts in the Optina Scriptorium. The most outstanding of all Nilus' books was the monumental spiritual journal *On the Banks of God's River.* The unpublished manuscript of the second volume of this work was in the possession of Helen.

Ivan Michailovich and Helen were married in June of 1935. They deliberately went all the way to Algiers for the wedding in order that it be performed by another disciple of Optina, Fr. Basil Shustin, who had been the spiritual son of St. John of Kronstadt and Elders Barsanuphius and Nectarius. As a wedding present to themselves, they bought a twelve-volume set of the Lives of Saints by St. Demetrius of Rostov, and obtained visas for making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Due to emigration laws, however, Helen was unable to leave. So as not to waste his wedding vacation, Ivan Michailovich, with the blessing of his wife, went alone to Mount Athos. That was how they spent their "honeymoon."

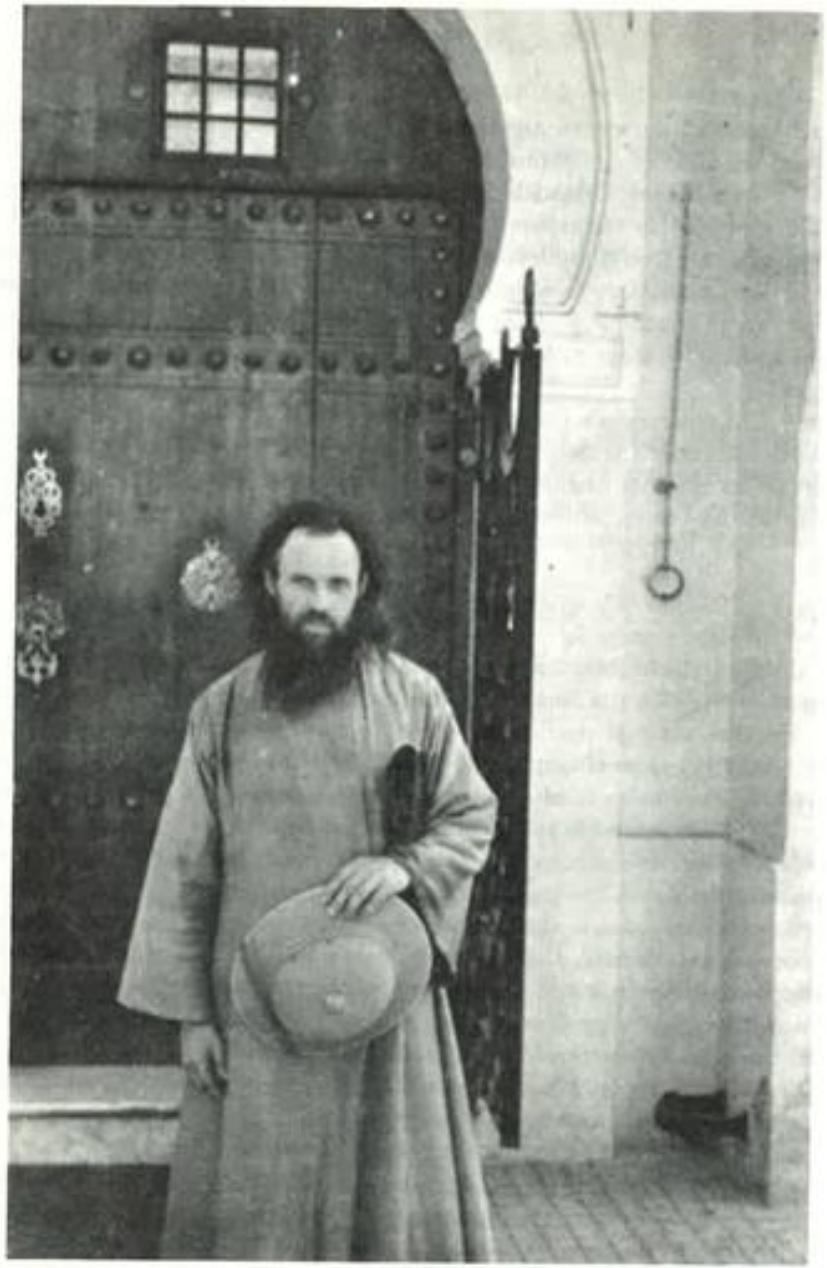
The Kontzevitch couple spent the latter part of the 1930's in various remote villages in the South of France, where Ivan Michailovich continued his work as an electrical engineer. This gave them the opportunity to visit ancient Christian catacombs, monasteries, and hermitage caves of 6th-century Gaul.

6. HIS BEGINNINGS AS A WRITER

While Elder Nectarius was still alive, he advised Ivan Michailovich to combine study at the Sorbonne with attendance at lectures in the Theological Institute. At that time, however, he could not do this. But when, during the war, this opportunity presented itself, he seized it. Entering the Institute, he strove, in addition to obtaining theological knowledge, to develop in himself the ability to write well. His interest in becoming a writer was in part brought about by his close association with Bishop Benjamin, who had authored several wonderful books: *A Universal Luminary – St. Seraphim of Sarov,* and *Heaven on Earth,* which was a study of St. John of Kronstadt's liturgical theology. Helen was also dedicated to Bishop Benjamin and his literary work, since this Bishop was a spiritual son of her beloved Archbishop Theophan of Poltava. She and Ivan Michailovich would help Bishop Benjamin as much as they could, spending hours typesetting his spiritually edifying works.

When Ivan Michailovich turned in his first written work at the Theological Institute, Professor A. V. Kartashev addressed him in a flattering way, recommending that he write and not bury his talent in the ground.

In finishing the Institute, Ivan Michailovich turned in a dissertation consisting of two parts: 1) eldership, and 2) the path to it. This subject was of vital interest to him. He wished to find a precise theological definition of the essence of authentic eldership and its place in the Church. He understood that there were two separate concepts not to be confused: elder and spiritual



RIGHTEOUS PRIEST BASIL SHUSTIN
(reposed on the feast of the Transfiguration, 1968)

A disciple of St. John of Kronstadt and Optina Elders
Barsanuphius and Nectarius.

father. In his dissertation he could not yet give an exhaustive answer; but for this essay his scholarship was continued, with the intention that he would write a book.

In spite of Professor Kartashev's encouragement and Bishop Benjamin's inspiration, Ivan Michailovich was actually rather reluctant to write books due to his inherent bashfulness. This is where his wife Helen stepped in. It was only with her strength behind him that he was able to follow through with his literary intentions. While he was out working as an engineer to put bread on the table, she was spending all her time selflessly doing research in all the Parisian theological libraries, bringing home huge stacks of books, notes and other information needed for his work.

In this way, Ivan Michailovich was able to complete his great work *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*. The preponderance of the work was actually done by Helen. Ivan Michailovich's work lay in the arrangement of the material, its stylistic treatment and its final polishing. The harmony of their mutual labor was the result of the oneness of their minds and spiritual orientation. They were indeed "one body, one flesh."

7. HIS THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION: THE DEFINITION OF ELDERSHIP

The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit was published in Paris in 1952. In it the author showed the spiritual bond between ancient Russia and Byzantium and the other Eastern lands that had received Byzantine culture, where there was a blossoming of the traditions and heritage of the Orthodox ascetics and where patristic literature reigned. Numerous ascetics of Holy Russia were constantly travelling to the East and kept alive the spiritual tie with this great Orthodox culture until the invasion of the Turks. After this the grace-giving source dried up. . . . The character of ascetic struggle was altered and became more difficult.

In the libraries of Paris were a few works which dealt with the subject of eldership. C. N. Leontiev had written on it in his book *Father Clement Sederholm*, and the above-mentioned S. Nilus had written in detail on it. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov came closer than others to this question: he distinguished the features of authentic eldership from false eldership, which he castigated mercilessly, calling it "play-acting." Finally, Prof. Smirnov in the *Theological Herald* devoted a learned work to this subject. But no one had given a direct answer to the question Ivan Michailovich had asked.

During the earliest centuries of Christianity such a definition was not needed: eldership was not a secret for anyone. In those times, when a certain elder punished a monk by forbidding him to eat bread, and then himself died, the local council that gathered did not consider itself to have the right to loose the elder's interdiction. At that time there were no conflicts between the authority of elders and that of apostles.

But when, with the fall of Byzantium, patristic literature fell into disuse, and later, when Western influence began to penetrate, the patristic teaching was almost forgotten. Eldership was restored to something of its former state at the end of the 18th century by Schema-Archimandrite Paisius Velichkovsky, but it was received in many places as a novelty. Elders like St. Seraphim of Sarov, Hiero-schemamonk Leonid of Optina, Hiero-schemamonk Ambrose, and others were persecuted.

After the Revolution, when the Russian intelligentsia began to turn to God, many became priests, and some imagined themselves to be elders. These "young elders," as someone has called them, have brought much harm to their spiritual children. There was even a case of suicide. Ivan Michailovich knew this.

In addition, there was a case that affected him closely. He had a friend who possessed an uncommon mind and the gift of words. Elder Nectarius blessed him to enter the Institute. While the question of a scholarship was pending, this friend began an independent business which immediately turned into a gold mine. Meanwhile the scholarship was awarded to him. He didn't want to abandon his successful business. He decided to turn to Bishop Benjamin, asking him to remove from him the Elder's command. He spent a long time in conversation with him. He left the Bishop no longer himself, changed, downcast — however, he received what he wanted. But from this moment the "gold mine" failed. His whole life went off the track. . . . The Bishop had no right to alter the Elder's command, the direct will of God. Ivan Michailovich knew this clearly; but how could he prove it?

The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia, which appeared as the first volume of his planned work, did not yet give an exhaustive reply to this question. A year later, in America, when Ivan Michailovich was teaching a course in Patrology in Holy Trinity Seminary, he wrote a biography of Elder Nectarius; the answer was found and given in the introduction to this work, where he defines eldership as the *prophetic ministry* in the Church. Here is how Ivan Michailovich writes of this in the introduction to the above-mentioned work:

"The Apostle Paul enumerates three ministries in the Church, independent of the church hierarchy: apostles, prophets, teachers" (Eph. 4:11, I Cor. 12:28). Immediately after the apostles stand prophets. Their ministry consists primarily of 'edification, exhortation, and comfort' (I Cor. 14:3). With this aim, and also for pointing out or warning, prophets also predict future events.

"Through the prophet, the will of God is immediately revealed; and therefore his authority is limitless.

"The prophetic ministry is a special gift of grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit (charisma). The prophet possesses a special spiritual vision — clairvoyance. For him the boundaries of space and time are, as it were, set aside; with his spiritual gaze he sees not only events that are occurring now, but also future events. He sees their spiritual meaning; he sees the soul of man, his past and future.

"Such a high calling cannot but be bound up with a high moral level, with purity of heart, with personal sanctity. Sanctity of life, indeed, was required of the prophet from the first period of Christianity: 'He must have the manner of the Lord. From his manner may be distinguished the false prophet and the (true) prophet,' says one of the oldest works of Christian literature, the *Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles).*

"The ministries enumerated by the Apostle Paul have been preserved in the Church in all ages. The ministries of apostle, prophet, and teacher, being independent, may be combined with the rank of bishop or priest.

"The prophetic ministry, bound up with personal sanctity, has flourished when spiritual life in the Church was high, and has declined in decadent periods. Most brightly of all is it manifested in monastic eldership. Being a direct continuation of the prophetic ministry, it appeared under this name and in this form only in the 4th century, together with the arising of monasticism, as its guiding principle. . . .

"Those who give themselves over entirely to the guidance of a true elder experience a special feeling of joy and freedom in the Lord. The writer of these lines has experienced this personally. An elder is the immediate carrier of the will of God. Communion with God is always bound up with a feeling of spiritual freedom, joy, and indescribable peace in the soul. On the contrary, a false elder eclipses God by means of himself, placing his own will in place of God's will, something which is bound up with a feeling of slavery, oppression, and almost always, despondency.[2] In addition, the entire submission of a disciple

2. However, it is characteristic of spiritual deception that such negative feelings may not appear at once, and a false sense of fevered "joy" may be a part of the deception of submitting to a false elder; in that case, the despondency is revealed later (tr. note).

to a false elder corrodes his personality, destroys his will, corrupts his sense of justice and rightness, and thus takes from him the awareness of responsibility for his acts.

"Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov has written thus concerning false eldership: 'It is a frightful thing to accept the responsibilities (of eldership), which may be fulfilled only by command of the Holy Spirit, when contact with satan has not yet been broken off and one's vessel does not cease to be defiled by the activity of satan (that is, dispassion has not yet been attained). Such imposture and play-acting is terrible. It is ruinous for oneself and for one's close ones; it is criminal before God and blasphemous' (Bp. Ignatius, *Works,* St. Petersburg, 1860, Vol. IV, p. 92)."

Ivan Michailovich developed further his ideas on "false eldership," which he considered very symptomatic of our age of spiritual decline, in the first chapter of his posthumously published book, *Optina and Its Era.*

"False eldership evokes a *hypnosis of ideas.* And since a false idea lies at the root, this idea evokes a spiritual blindness. When the false idea overshadows reality, no arguments whatever are accepted, since they hit against the fixed idea which is considered an immovable axiom.[3]

"A man moves forward like a sleepwalker, until he hits his forehead against a wall. He shatters his own head, and often that of one bound up with him. A similar catastrophe overtakes the adherents of false eldership. This is why among them there are such frequent incidents of suicide and every kind of despair. . . .

"When true elders, one may say, no longer exist, people who thirst to find spiritual support for themselves choose some spiritual person whom for some reason they find sympathetic, and they say: 'I act towards him as towards an elder.' If the spiritual father is sober and spiritually honest, he sharply declines such a relationship. But how many there are who willingly fall into the net laid out for them. For this 'play-acting,' in the expression of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, leads the self-appointed elder to spiritual death. He himself loses the ground under his feet and goes by crooked ways, losing everything that he has gathered and obtained in his life up to then.

"The true relationship of an elder to his disciple is called in ascetic literature a 'spiritual mystery'; it is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Abundant evidence of this phenomenon may be seen in many of today's cults: the follower of the cult leader mindlessly repeats the teachings and phrases he has been taught by a kind of "brainwashing," with no ability to discuss them rationally or to test them by contact with reality. What the leader says overshadows reality, and the leader himself takes the place of God. An extreme example of this may be seen in the mass suicide at "Jonestown" in 1978 (tr. note).

But every kind of imitation and falsification are manifestations from the left side. If the former path leads to life, the latter, if a man does not come to himself in time, casts him into a total disorder of spiritual life which has as its end every kind of catastrophe" (*Optina and Its Era,* pp. 12-13).

Concerning true eldership, Ivan Michailovich continues:

"The influence of eldership extended far beyond the boundaries of a monastery's walls. Elders spiritually guided not only monks, but also laymen. Possessing the gift of clairvoyance, they edified, exhorted, and comforted everyone (I Cor. 14:3); they healed illnesses of soul and body, warned against dangers, indicated the path of life, revealed the will of God.

"In recent times in Russia eldership especially flourished in Optina Monastery" (*Orthodox Way* for 1952, Jordanville, pp. 42-45).

Ivan Michailovich's definition and discussion of eldership is most valuable for our own times, when true God-bearing elders have entirely vanished, but false elders are as abundant as ever. (Those who are still called "elders" in today's monasteries, if they are honest, will be the first to say that they are only trying to be simple spiritual fathers and could never pretend to the awesome responsibilities of true God-bearing elders such as Optina had.)

8. HIS LAST YEARS

In order to pay for *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit* to be printed in 1952, the Kontzevitch couple had to sell their property, including their furniture and wardrobe. That same year they came to America. They were almost penniless; practically all they had to their name were boxes of their newly-published book. They settled near Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, New York, where Ivan Michailovich had been invited to teach a course on Patrology to the students. In the following year, 1953, in the lectures he composed, he tried to open up to his hearers a broader view of the teaching of the Holy Fathers on ascetic struggle, the inward work which is crowned by the grace of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

In the next year Ivan Michailovich moved to San Francisco to be near his brother and sister, whom before his arrival in America he had not seen for 35 years. Here he wrote a remarkable book: *Leo Tolstoy – The Origins of his Spiritual Crisis.* This book was published before the religious events of the present day, which have shaken the contemporary world. But everything that is occurring today on a world-wide level was depicted beforehand, as in a little mirror, in the personal life of Tolstoy.

HELEN KONTZEVITCH AT HOLY TRINITY MONASTERY
with Fr. Ambrose Konovalov, a disciple of the Optina Elders.

A photograph taken while the Kontzevitches were living in Jordanville.

The penetrating author of the book on Tolstoy, when he was writing it in the mid-1950's, turned his careful attention precisely to the manifestations which, ten years later, have so quickly and unexpectedly blossomed like a double flower: first, the "post-Christianity" preached by Tolstoy (in a letter to the artist Jan Styk he calls himself a former Christian); and second, the desire to create a pan-religion out of all existing beliefs. Enthusiasm is growing, indeed, for the syncretic religion of Bahai, which was born in Asia and has passed over to America, where on Lake Michigan its adepts have built a temple which attracts 100,000 visitors a year. The evil genius of Tolstoy was really a genius, if it could predict and manifest beforehand with such precision the spirit of the coming epoch. It only remains now that the Eastern religions, which were in such favor with Tolstoy, should assume a leading place in the world – which indeed they are now beginning to do.

Besides this very important work, Ivan Michailovich gave a number of lectures in this period. With special love and care, which were in general a part of his character, he gave lectures to the San Francisco circle of the St. Vladimir Youth organization. At these gatherings, which were attended not only by young people, he gave several lectures devoted to a favorite subject of his: the letters of Elder Macarius of Optina to laymen. This was an indispensable book for him; it was inseparable from him, and he would read it as a treasury of spiritual wisdom in all incidents of life when advice was needed, when some question had to be understood, or when the soul was simply hungry for spiritual food. Ivan Michailovich labored much at devising a system arranging the utterances of the Elder by subjects.

We will relate one incident which illustrates how Elder Macarius' counsels provided practical help to Ivan Michailovich. In 1961, Helen decided that they should move across the San Francisco Bay and buy a house in the town of Berkeley, in order to be close to the university library there. Ivan Michailovich's brother Bishop Nektary and his sister Vera, both of whom lived in San Francisco, were strongly opposed to this idea. Ivan Michailovich was in a quandary. Praying for an answer, he opened the book of the counsels of Elder Macarius. And on the page he randomly turned to, his eyes fell on these words of the Elder: "You're thinking of buying a house. God bless you to do it." Thus it was that the Kontzevitches moved to Berkeley.

Ivan Michailovich wrote many articles, of which only a certain part was published during his lifetime. He also labored and thought much on his book on Optina, which was to be a continuation of *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit*. The outlines of many proposed articles of his have been preserved.

A year before his death Ivan Michailovich had a serious operation. After this he gradually lost strength, but his spirit remained as alert as ever; it seemed that spiritually he was stronger than ever. After Pascha, 1965, he began clearly to waste away, but he finally took to his bed, out of complete weakness, only just before his very death, which occurred on July 6 (June 23, O.S.) at 6:30 p.m. He endured great sufferings in silence, without complaining, courageously, in submission to the will of God.

For the last two weeks of his life he received Holy Communion every day. "Will I suffer for long?" – the words burst from him on his deathbed; but he immediately answered himself: "Let me suffer longer, that it might be better for me in the Kingdom of Heaven." Surrounded by the icons with which he had been blessed by Elders Nectarius and Anatole and which were now held constantly by his wife, brother, and sister, who took turns at his bedside, Ivan Michailovich quietly, as if falling asleep, departed to the other world. A barely noticeable smile was impressed on his lips. A humble man who always kept himself outside the center of attention, he was granted a triumphant burial: his funeral service was celebrated by three bishops (Archbishop John Maximovitch, Bishop Nektary, and Bishop Savva) and six other clergymen.

A life devoted to the acquisition of the field of spiritual life, for the sake of the treasure hidden in it, came to an end. Ivan Michailovich resolutely and unsparingly labored, but did not harvest the fruits. Evidently he was to receive the fruits in the other life.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

9. CONTINUING THE WORK

Having buried her husband, Helen Kontzevitch was left with a huge amount of material which Ivan Michailovich had conceived but never completed. His monumental *Spiritual Triology,* the first volume of which was *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit,* was to have two other volumes: *St. Paisius Velichkovsky and his Disciples,* and *Optina Monastery and Its Era.* On his deathbed, he had begged his sorrowing disciple to help his wife complete the Trilogy.

As it turned out, Helen outlived her husband by 24 years. Although shattered by his death, she took hold of herself and completed the work. It did not come out in three volumes as intended, for she blended the second part with the third and published the whole in a 600-page volume under the

title *Optina Monastery and Its Era.* After this book was printed in 1970 at Holy Trinity Monastery, Helen went on to write a series of articles for various magazines, as well as three books: 1) *Abbess Sophia,* 2) *St. Seraphim of Sarov,* and 3) *Holy People I Have Known.* The latter is still in manuscript form.

Helen's works were primarily written as a means of uniting the glorious past of Holy Russia with the new generations – both with Americans and with the awakening powers in Russia. She was the embodiment of Orthodox tradition. She had seen how her spiritual father Theophan of Poltava had risen up in defense of the purity of the Orthodox faith against all innovations: against renovationism, the Living Church, Church Calendar reforms, and against the false dogma of redemption which implied that the Cross was not necessary for our salvation. Following in Theophan's footsteps, Helen considered it her sacred duty to defend this purity in any way possible. Since she was so adamant in her defense of the true dogma of redemption through the Cross, it is remarkable that her patron Saint, Equal-to-the-Apostles Helen, was the one who rediscovered the Lord's Cross for Christendom. Helen Kontzevitch even wrote the Life of St. Helen based on new discoveries (see *Orthodox Word,* no. 18). And when, on March 6/19, 1989, she died at the age of 95 after a prolonged sickness, this happened to be the very day when the Holy Orthodox Church commemorated St. Helen's discovery of the Cross, as well as the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The fortieth day after her repose (when according to tradition the soul ascends to heaven), fell on Good Friday – the day of the death of our Lord on the Cross, whereby our redemption was truly effected. These, of course, were not mere coincidences; they were signs that she had found favor with the Son of God for defending the Orthodox teaching on His crucifixion.

10. TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The authors of *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit* were fully part of the whole Orthodox patristic tradition. They were not just doing scholarship and speculating on this tradition, but were transmitting it "from the inside," having had flesh-and-blood contact with saints whose predecessors they wrote about. Even before she was born, Helen's life was touched by the blessing of a saint. When her mother went to St. John of Kronstadt to obtain a blessing for marriage, the Saint told her that her first-born would be a daughter, and that she would one day serve the Church – which indeed came about.

Ivan Michailovich was responsible for "discovering" Optina, first for his whole family, and later, through his writings, for new generations of God-

seekers. Besides writing on Optina themselves, he and his wife acquired an unrivaled collection of books on Optina, many of which were available nowhere else in the world, having been destroyed, lost or hidden after the Russian Revolution. Some of these books they purchased when portions of the Optina Monastery Library were being sold at an auction in Paris. In addition to priceless books on Optina by S. Nilus, they had in their possession rare monographs on the Optina Elders, facsimiles of which were printed during their lifetime and sent to Russia. And today, when Optina Monastery is being opened again after 70 years of forced closure, it is the Kontzevitches' invaluable collection of Optina material that will provide the foundation on which Optina will revive in spirit – if God's blessing will be upon this.

For English-speaking students of Orthodox spirituality, the works of both Kontzevitches are indispensable tools for acquiring precision in discerning the genuine spirit of Orthodox saints.

– Abbot Herman and Brotherhood
St. Herman of Alaska Monastery

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by I. M. KONTZEVITCH

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